

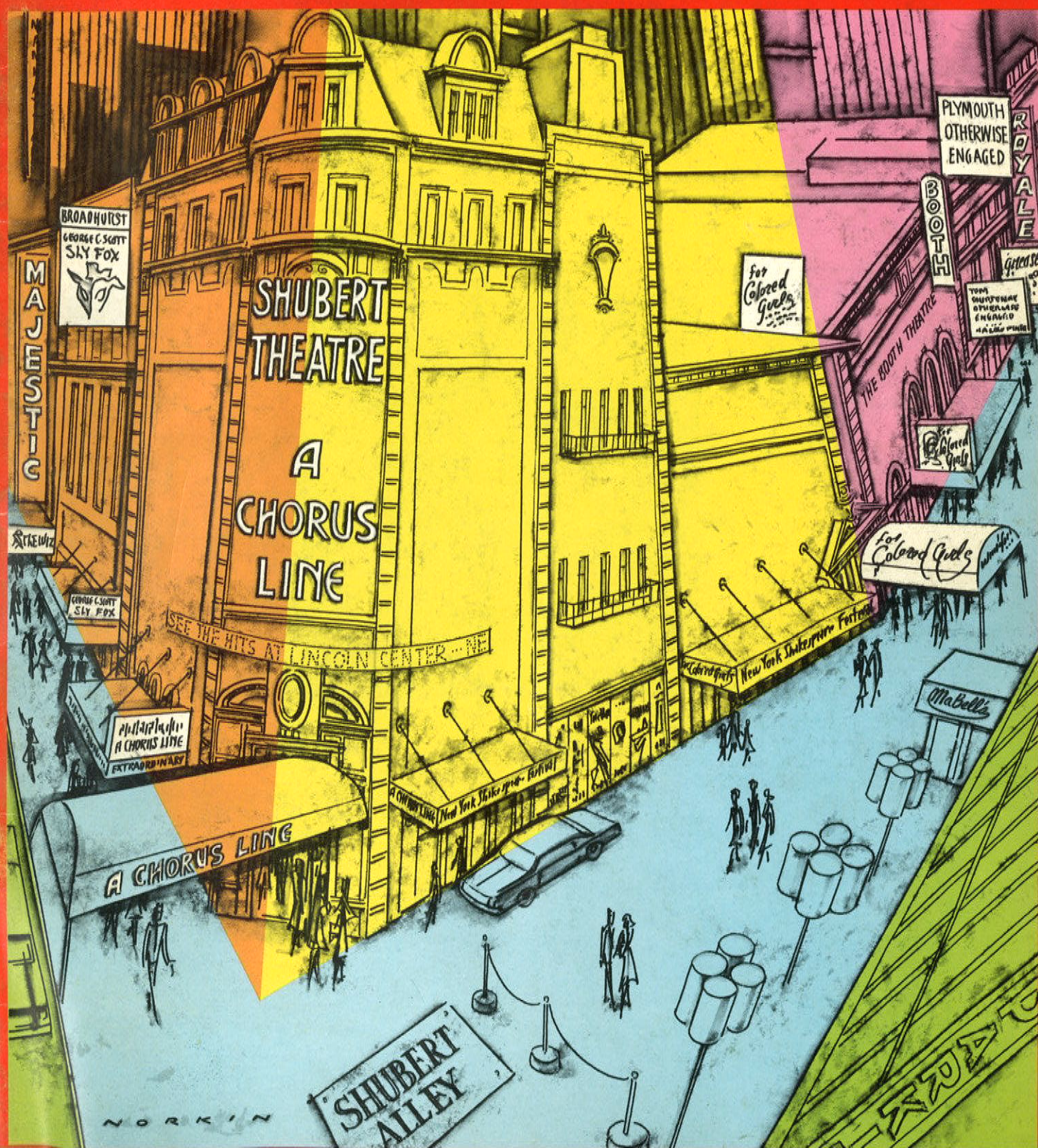
New York THEATRE REVIEW

PREVIEW
ISSUE

REVIEWS / NEWS / OPINIONS / MEMORABILIA / PREVIEWS / INTERVIEWS

SPRING / SUMMER 1977

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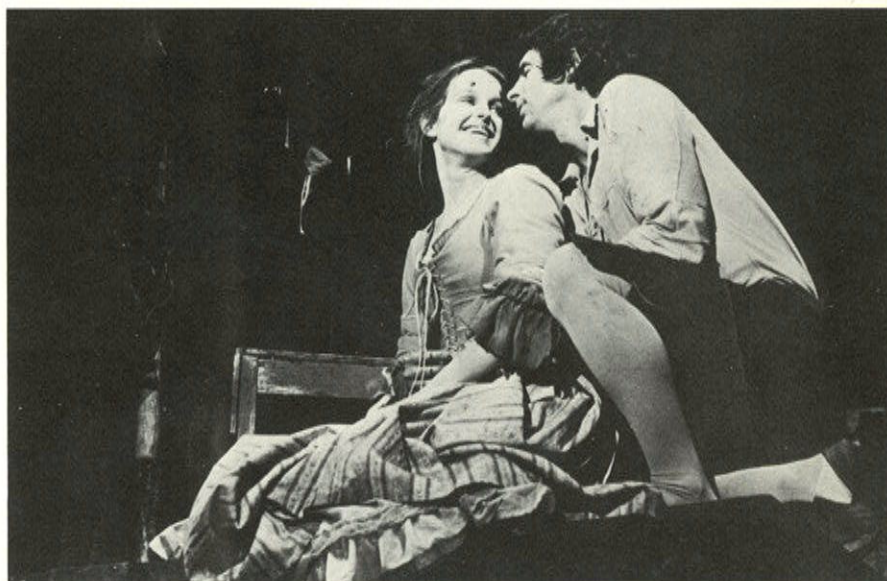
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NEW YORK THEATRE REVIEW

PREVIEW ISSUE
SPRING / SUMMER '77

COVER:
SHUBERT ALLEY
by Sam Norkin
see story page 12



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GUEST EDITORIAL

Government Subsidy For Commercial Theatre

by RICHARD BARR

Producer

(President, League of New York Theatres &
Producers)

Regardless of some dissenting voices, Broadway is still the theatre capital of the world. It will not remain so without daring new serious work. It cannot present these under the present system.

The serious American commercial theatre today is an art form, not an industry. It can no longer support the assumption that its participants can maintain their present standard of living through it alone. Compared to the business community, there is little possibility of a continuity of effort being rewarded with a commensurate income. It is impractical for anyone interested in serious theatre to enter it as a profession.

The fact that royalties (including star salaries) and real estate generally account for 50% of the gross, before one salary or one ad is paid, makes an investment from private capital questionable—to put it mildly.

This fact has pushed the serious and the experimental theatre from Broadway to subsidized situations. There is probably nothing wrong with this. What is wrong is to ignore the fact.

I believe we must establish a method for moving works quickly and easily—on a non-profit basis—from subsidy to the commercial arena.

The commercial theatre *must* continue to produce the new serious and experimental work. If it cannot obtain direct subsidy to do this, it must invent a method of doing it indirectly.

Because, should Broadway dry up, all the regional areas will dry up. No playwright worth his salt wants a new play to die in a regional theatre. Nor will he want solely a regional theatre interchange of his work. The same applies to directors, designers, and above all, to actors.

Subsidy by the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Arts Council has been conspicuously free from political interference. Unfortunately, these groups are permitted to give grants only to non-profit organizations. Once this situation is corrected, and I believe it will be, serious work will reappear on the Broadway stage, to the great benefit of the artists participating, and the audiences attending.

An Open Letter From the Editor . . .

For many years now, I've heard my friends and associates in the theatre bemoaning the fact that we don't have a theatre magazine — not since THEATRE ARTS faded away. It is our intention to fulfill that specialized void.

The NEW YORK THEATRE REVIEW plans regular monthly issues starting with the Fall theatrical season. We intend to serve the needs of the theatre community, as a specialty magazine focusing on live theatre.

Since we are a REVIEW, one main function of the publication will be *complete* coverage of the New York theatre scene. We will provide that "one-stop" media, covering the whole panorama that makes up Broadway, off-Broadway, off-off-Broadway, and adjacent regional-dinner-seasonal theatre.

There will be no single "first string" critic or reviewer who will be the critical spokesman or arbiter. Personalities of our reviewers will be submerged to knowledge of theatrical invention and execution. An ability to recognize and analyze a production's problems and virtues will be more important than a facility with words — although a clear and concise writing style will be a basic ingredient of our reviews. We will attempt to make them exciting, readable, and unequivocal — but in a way that supports rather than destroys the theatre.

This PREVIEW ISSUE is intended to show our readers the various elements that will comprise our regular issues.

A CRITICS' ROUNDTABLE will be a monthly feature. Two or more critics will defend their opposing views, face-to-face, often confronting the creators of the show they are discussing. The ROUNDTABLE will also serve as a forum where issues, as well as specific productions, can be explored in depth. Playwrights, directors, producers, performers can confront their critics, so that we may truly examine the intentions versus the successes of particular shows, or weigh the pros and cons of certain ideas or programs.

In a section called TWO VIEWS, there will be side-by-side reviews of important or controversial plays, either by reviewers with opposing viewpoints, or by a reviewer and the author/director/star/producer of the show. The two views will be written independently, not as an answer to each other.

A photo-essay of a new play will be in each issue, with the story line and dramatic action told in pictures/captions/dialogue. The play will be photographed during rehearsals or the out-of-town tryout, with the photos appearing prior to the New York opening.

The "cover story" will view some important force or trend in the theatre, examining people and ideas in a very practical approach, evaluating the potentially positive or negative effects on "the theatre."

Each month, a different creative theatre artist will tell what he "does" — director, producer, playwright, press agent, stage manager, designer, etc. There will also be brief interviews with new creative talent in all areas (on-stage, back-stage, off-stage) in a feature called SPOTLIGHT, as well as in PEOPLE WHO MAKE THEATRE.

A nostalgic look backward at New York's theatre history will occur regularly.

Although based in New York, and concentrating on local theatre activity, there will be monthly reports from various theatre cities around the country. The major critics in those cities will provide a regular round-up column, covering critical reports as well as news of the theatre activity and climate in their areas.

If you've ever asked why there isn't a theatre magazine, or have just said, "At last there is a theatre magazine!," follow it up. We need your support — in the form of subscriptions. Ten dollars a year — for twelve issues, is all that it takes to insure that a vital theatre magazine can exist. It's less than the price of a single orchestra seat, and it's your ticket to a whole year of exciting and informative coverage of the theatre.

Those who are represented in this issue, both writers and theatre people, have so unselfishly contributed their time and talent because they recognize and support the need for a theatre magazine. We hope you feel the same way.

A specialized magazine like ours needs subscribers as a strong base for our readership. We think the time is *now* for the NEW YORK THEATRE REVIEW!

—Ira J. Bilowit

Critics' Roundtable

JOHN SIMON / T.E. KALEM: RICHARD EDER / HENRY HEWES

(New Leader)

(Time Magazine)

(New York Times)

(Saturday Review)

"THE CHERRY ORCHARD"



Henry Hewes



T.E. Kalem / Richard Eder



John Simon

(Editor's Note: For the record, Joseph Papp, Andrei Serban and Jean-Claude van Itallie each declined the invitation to discuss their *CHERRY ORCHARD* with Henry Hewes and John Simon. Because we felt it was a controversial and important production, which needed some discussion, we altered the make-up of our usual Critics' Roundtable format. We invited two critics who were dissatisfied with the production to confront two critics who favored it. The following transcript has been edited to conform with space limitations. The meaning has not been changed. The punctuation and grammar, in converting from the spoken to the written word, have at times become the prerogative of the editor. The participants have not seen this written transcript prior to publication.—I.J.B.)

Hewes: I've followed the work of Andrei Serban from the time he first came to La Mama in this country—on through the Greek trilogy—*MEDEA*, *ELECTRA*, and *THE TROJAN WOMEN*. And then his version of Brecht's *THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN*, and finally last summer in France an outdoor version of *AS YOU LIKE IT*. So I'm kind of used to what he does, and I think that I went to *THE CHERRY ORCHARD* knowing that he was working not with his own company but with a company that by and large was a Lincoln Center company. And I wondered how it would come out. And I was ready for it, but not ready for it.

In the first portion of it, I said to myself, some of the things that are being done are outrageous. And I don't know really what I meant by that except that I had the feeling that while the little bits were rather funny or adventurous, I couldn't become comfortable with it. And it took me quite a while before I became more or less comfortable with what is really not *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*, but Andrei Serban's impressions of *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*. And I think that as you look at this play, it's like looking at a series of sketches by

an artist in which you don't ask of the painting, "Why are these two figures so strange?" or "Why is this person wearing this color?" or "Why is this a picture of a house in which there is no window?"

These things are the prerogative of the artist, and you accept this as his strange and remarkable vision. And certainly I think that ordinarily I would suspect that the director was being capricious, but having the advantage of knowing Serban's work, I know that he is dedicated to finding what he considers the central emotional truth of the situations in the play. He also is dedicated to finding out what bothered Chekhov about Stanislavski's production, and to some extent, hopefully doing something which would balance the traditional view of *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*.

As you know, Chekhov wanted it to be much more comic, and much more farcical than Stanislavski produced it as. And I think that whatever else you can say, he certainly has found a lot of the farcical element in it—which bothers a lot of people who expect this play to be the traditional gloomy piece. I find a number of extraordinary things in it: Irene Worth's Madame Ranevskaya's couple of times around the edge of the forestage is certainly an unforgettable moment, whether you like it or not. And if you want to get to the symbolism of it, she runs in a circle, and the circle is womblike, and the house is the house of her birth, so she is in a certain sense going back to her birth in a circular motion.

There is this sort of thing, instance after instance of it, in the play. And I think that the quarrel that we may have with it is our inability to relate some of these extraordinary sequences to the text or to each other. And that, I think, is the challenge to the audience. And the whole

premise on which this kind of experimental theatre is based is accepting such a challenge. I find that I very often, in this kind of work, go away feeling that I appreciate it more almost after I have seen it than I did when I was there, because the visions are so striking.

Eder: I'm not troubled by whether this is an idiosyncratic, disrespectful version. I don't think that has much sense or much meaning. I think the play's defect, to the degree that it has a defect—and it does—is a sort of an abundance of good things, some of which are not sufficiently subordinated to each other. Sometimes it seems like a lot of elements side by side, enough of them good, even if one doesn't like some of them, so that one is quite happy with them individually.

And yet one wonders just where the leading note is. This is particularly true in the first act. On the other hand, I think that Serban, in this difficult first act, has succeeded in expressing very strongly things that conventional directors have not expressed so clearly. There is a wildness, there is a savagery about the scene. He was a very strong, a very melodramatic writer. There is—the phrase is undefensible but I'll use it nevertheless—a certain Russianness about the essence that I think he conveys.

There are a number of individual things and we'll talk about them later. But I will point out in the first act the entrance of Firs, dressed in black so he stands out from the general confusion, and his ecstasy is kind of a sign of the fragility of the whole house. It is the most extreme example of hope in the whole play. It is ridiculous, it's ludicrous, it's exaggerated, and yet it's terribly moving.

There are many small details that stick, and one can't really defend particular details because they strike you or

Critics' Roundtable

"THE CHERRY ORCHARD"



they don't. But I felt, for example, when Anya falls asleep in exhaustion, the way the toys which are heaped up, are pulled out in a line of uneven intervals, it made a kind of visual image of a line marked by ellipses leading into the past. And all of a sudden you seem to see the whole biography of that house just in the physical positioning of these toys—an example, I think, of where Serban was able to make physical images, to make what Irene Worth calls "the calligraphy of space", work and give us a message that to me is entirely present in Chekhov.

Kalem: An awful lot of mileage has been utilized out of Chekhov saying to Stanislavski that really it was a comedy verging on farce. Now there's a very real question about what playwrights actually know about their plays except to write them. Tennessee Williams—this is in the Sunday Times—spoke before some high school students, and one of them said "Why don't you ever write any humorous plays?" "Obviously you haven't read my plays," he shot back. And I think that's a perfectly legitimate comment on his part, because there's a great deal of humor there. But let us get his next sentence, which I suppose will appear in future books on the theatre, "Blanche Dubois is one of the funniest women ever written."

UNCLE VANYA was again based on this premise, although I caught most of what Mike Nichols did with UNCLE VANYA. But I'm going to say flatly the things that I'm opposed to without saying that I hated it (CHERRY ORCHARD), nor have I dissuaded a single person from going to it. I think in terms of its origin, we have what I call "Peter Brook Fallout" compounded with "Robert Wilson Visual Semi-Surrealistic Effects", and so forth. Why am I disturbed about "Peter Brook Fallout"? I think that Peter Brook, even though he handles certain things very well, has an almost dictatorial aplomb—which I do object to. I object to the theatre ever becoming a director's medium.

Peter Brook convinced me that he was bored with the theatre, that he was bored with what might be called a traditional production of something. There's nothing wrong with a cliché; cliché em-

bodies a certain truth. A traditional production of a play embodies a certain truth if that play has been written that way in the first place. One doesn't really need to tinker with Shakespeare or with Chekhov or with playwrights of the first magnitude, in order to produce new effects.

What are the effects that I object to? I object to the disappearance of the house, because I think the house is the central image. I don't think you need to see the cherry orchard. My wife said to me, just to bring her into it, "Once you see those mingy little trees, you can understand Lopakhin's viewpoint. Let's cut them down and put up a few cottages there, and really make the thing worthwhile." Why can't Madame Ranevskaya do it? She cannot do it because her grandfather, her father, everybody lived there. They lived in the house. The house is the central image of the play, not the orchard. The orchard is the image that the audience can easily envisage. In fact, it should only be, as in certain productions that I've seen in the past, that *maybe* you caught a glimpse of it.

But the real telling moment of THE CHERRY ORCHARD—and mind you, here's a failure in just technical expertise—is when you hear the ax hitting those trees. When you hear them hitting the trees in this production, it doesn't sound like trees being felled by an ax at all, it sounds like something being dropped on the stage like a cement block.

Hewes: Well, they were skimpy little trees.

Kalem: Well, all right. But anyway, we don't really need to have those trees brought to our attention in quite that way, and have the house taken from us. We need the house. I insist that it is not a moving moment when she whirls and whirls around the stage as if she'd been sent to a sanitarium, with those huge white walls by which he's trying to hide the defects of the Vivian Beaumont—which has always leaked intensity. Well, he's covered that by going all white, which of course again he borrowed from Peter Brook: the all-white MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM—which was an antiseptic gymnasium, in his case.

Another unacceptable thing is to reach those particular levels of slapstick

farce. It's all very well to say that people are funny and people are farcical. If someone's nickname is "22 Misfortunes", and you spell that out in that rather crude kind of way, you're not only underlining, but crudely underlining what's already been said. The playwright has already done that. It's been pointed out by someone else—though I must say that I feel it—that if you actually didn't know the play, you would be mystified throughout most of the evening as to precisely what was happening.

Simon: Henry has previously said that Serban gives us the truth as he sees it. In a nutshell, that's what's wrong with this entire production. We are not interested in the truth as a Roumanian parvenu pipsqueak sees it. We're interested in the truth as the great master Chekhov saw it. And there are pipsqueaks whose names range from Brook to Wilson, from Serban to O'Horgan who think that it is their duty to rewrite plays that have been masterpieces for centuries, to tell us what they think Shakespeare is about, or what they would like Shakespeare to be about, or what Chekhov does. This is diddling, piddling and fiddling, and it has absolutely nothing to do with Chekhov or art or theatre.

Henry's analogy couldn't be faultier when he says that if a painter puts two funny little figures in the corner of a picture or does a house without windows, that is his privilege, even if it strikes us as funny. The painter is painting his own picture and he can do anything he wants to, as long as it's his own picture. If Serban were to do his own play, if he wrote a play and then staged it as he wants to, he would be entitled. It would be a piece of junk, because he's an impotent incapable moron. That is why he needs geniuses to provide him with a platform from which he can spread his idiocy to the world. Because if there were no such platforms, he would be flying in midair in a vacuum in nowhere. He has nothing to say, this man.

But this is what gives him his sensational value, that he has this great play to play around with. And if Chekhov writes black, he makes it white; if Chekhov writes white, he makes it black. And there are moronic reviewers all over the



place who say, "Ah, how novel, how interesting, how ingenious. How come no one else thought of it?" No one else thought of it because it's nonsense, and no one in his right mind would have thought of this. But, you see, here is the problem. The modern theatre director, at least the more odious and untalented sort—in which I include Brook, in which I include Serban, in which I include a lot of others, O'Horgan—are the kind of people who *don't* say "What is this work about?", which is the first and last question a responsible director should ask himself. They ask, "What can I do with this work? What can I do to this work? What can I do to set myself up as master director at the expense of this work?"

Now any fool can do this. And any fool can admire this. But can an intelligent man do this and can an intelligent person admire it? That is the question.

Hewes: Well, I don't know what directors you know, John, but it seems to me that with Peter Brook and Andrei Serban, I can't think of two people in the world who have more respect for Shakespeare and Chekhov than these two directors. These are not show-offs who just want to produce the contrary thing. And when I did say something about he gives the truth as he sees it, every director has to give us the truth as he sees it, because he's not Chekhov and he can use the ambiguities and the resonances of Chekhov to explore the truth.

As a matter of fact, in this play, there are many moments where he doesn't decide that Chekhov or Serban meant *one* thing. He leaves it ambiguous. He said in a letter yesterday that nobody

knows what this sound is that Chekhov has suddenly heard—in his manuscript he says that a strange sound is suddenly heard—nobody knows what this means. Now, Serban doesn't know either, but he enjoys the mystery of it and he respects the mystery of it. I didn't mean to imply that he was merely saying "I'll take this third-rate writer and make him into a first-rate theatre evening." And I don't think that Brook does either.

Eder: I think John is really arguing that plays should not be produced but merely read. Because unless John himself decides that the director, far from being a pipsqueek, is a genius, then the play should not be given. But this is such a unilateral approach. Any play given is obviously interpreted by the very act of being given.

Simon: Well, let me make it clear. Of course, that is the whole beauty of theatre as it continues through the ages, that anyone who humbly and loyally and touchingly sets out to do what he thinks Shakespeare or Chekhov intended, will naturally do something original or different, because as all of you quite rightly say, this anyone is not Shakespeare or Chekhov. That kind of difference is not only legitimate, it is necessary. That is what makes classical repertory viable and exciting; that the part of Othello is the part of Othello. There is no way in which that part becomes something else, but when Olivier does it, it's one thing, when Gielgud does it, it's another thing, and so on down the line. But each of them tries very hard to be as close to what he thinks the author intended.

But when Shakespeare says we're in

a forest, and Peter Brook gives us a gymnasium or a hospital or an insane asylum, then he is not trying as hard as he knows how to get at Shakespeare's intention. And the same with Serban. If Chekhov describes how the house looks, then that is how the house looks, and if Serban throws away the house and puts in something that he has stolen from Peter Brook... well, I now propose to show you that this entire production is stolen from all over the place. Not being a Serban groupie like Henry, I can't say what he did in other productions which I haven't followed. But I can tell you exactly where he stole everything in this particular one. The stage here was stolen partly from Brook's misguided *MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* and partly from Ellis Rabb's equally misguided *TWELFTH NIGHT*. And there is nothing original about this. It's only the misapplication of something that was misapplied slightly differently somewhere else that is original. But that kind of originality I spit upon.

Hewes: You seem to think that if somebody uses a phrase or a word or an idea that he must have stolen it. I think there are many things that come out the same in your reviews, in my reviews, in somebody else's reviews, but we didn't steal from each other. It's just that we all arrived at the same thought.

Simon: That's perfectly true. But you see, these are very faulty analogies. But there's something chronologically antecedent to this that I want to deal with. Yes, I mean, it's typical of a charlatan like Serban to latch onto the one element of mystery in that play which is deliberately in that play—which is a naturalistic, realistic play with one slight tiny but significant overtone that raises it out of naturalism—and that is that one. Which sound, if you read the Chekhov biography, was actually heard by Chekhov and a group of people, but they didn't know what it was. And he put it in there and that is the one element of mystery, that is the one debatable undefinable vague thing in an otherwise very precise play. And it's fine. It's like a tiny bit of unfinished painting that a painter leaves in an otherwise finished canvas. It adds another dimension, a suggestion of something beyond, and that's fine.

But to extrapolate from this that because there's one such thing that is vague and indeterminate, therefore I should take the entire play and treat it as if it were vague and indeterminate, and subject to my improvisatory whims and caprices—I mean, that is an absolutely illegitimate and immoral assumption which has no basis in any kind of rational justification.

Kalem: Let's go back to certain other

Critics' Roundtable "CHERRY ORCHARD"

aspects of the production which are very disturbing. I think in recent years there's a great mistake made when we impose on the playwright the consciousness of a later period.

Now, we have here pictures of Russian factories; we have here the implication that Chekhov sensed that this old order was leaving us and was going to be succeeded by the Russian Revolution, and so forth and so on. I don't think, for instance, that Evelyn Waugh could have written any of his novels if for a moment he had seriously believed that the old British order was about to collapse. Yet, some of the sense of frustration and stasis that you get in Chekhov is his probably innate conviction that nothing was going to change at all, that it was going to go on just that way forever.

To now superimpose upon it the knowledge of the Russian Revolution is again to me in many ways more unconscionable than some of the things that John has mentioned. It is absolutely unconscionable for the director to intrude himself in such a way that he superimposes his consciousness on the playwright's consciousness, and diminishes the actors. Irene Worth is giving a perfectly okay performance, but Irene Worth, as we know, is capable of an absolutely magnificent performance. All of the performers in that play are under the dominion of the particular distortion that Serban has placed upon the work.

They are never able to act continuously. In other words we have again moved into a film, where you only do a little three-minute stretch and then the scenery, in this case, imposes on you. Or someone's ideas impose on you. Whereas the actors should be able continuously to bring the whole thing to fruition. There should be—in Chekhov, of all plays—there should be a sense of timelessness at some point, where time seems to stand still. This play seems like a merry-go-round. It never stops at all.

One of the other influences, for instance, of putting those little objects around the stage which are supposedly from the house, but in a kind of surrealistic fashion, I thought were Daliesque... I mean, there were moments. But any time you begin to think about the scenery in a play more than you're thinking about the play itself, it's as if you were looking at a picture and seeing the frame. We ought not to be looking at Serban's frame, we ought to be looking at Chekhov's substance.

Eder: True, the actors are proportionately, or some are relatively, diminished by the intensity of other elements. But I don't think this is either good or bad. The question is to what purpose are they diminished. Are they diminished to a useful purpose? I believe they are. Secondly, those toys, those objects, you say your attention is attracted. When the effects are successful, and I believe they usually are, it's not that my attention's attracted to them—my attention's attracted to the fact that something is happening in me. And just as your would say in a conventional play "Why is this play so powerful?" and you would say "Because that actor is giving a terrific performance."

I can see that Serban is using other elements, and I see how he has used space, how he has used objects, how he has used even the positioning of figures—and this itself makes an effect. I don't see on what basis one says that if the effect is successful, there are certain means that are legitimate and certain means that are not. That Chekhov did not himself physically envision such a performance is undeniable. But that does not mean that if some of the basic themes of the play are conveyed powerfully by unconventional means, that this is a failure. On the contrary, it's a success.

So, the question to me is, "Are, in fact, his basic themes conveyed?" And I think they are conveyed, and conveyed in ways that I have not seen them conveyed before... In CHERRY ORCHARD and in other things he's done, he has in an odd way revitalized acting to some degree. Not the speaking part of acting with which he perhaps is still somewhat of a novice, that is speaking in vernacular, but with that part of acting that is *movement*. And that, if neglected in our theatre, is nevertheless in the total world theatre a traditionally extraordinarily important element. And I think Serban has done marvels with some of the physical aspects of acting, and that the result is some expressiveness in this play that we don't usually see.

Hewes: Ted, why does it bother you for him to put the play into historical perspective with the knowledge of what has occurred since suggested in the background?

Kalem: Well, I think among other things, that again would exist in the viewer's mind. It certainly does not need to be spelled out in that crude kind of way. I speak not only of the photographs of the factory but of that chain gang of Egypt-

tian slaves marching through the back with the plough. I mean that, in itself, is an insult to the audience. Furthermore, I believe in truth to the text. I really believe in truth to the text, because I think that when we talk about a classic and when we talk about some piece of work being timeless, we mean that it can speak to all people in all ages without having a political economic context, or having that spelled out.

We're really saying about great plays that they speak to us about the nature of being human. And in that sense, you destroy precisely the most valuable element of that work when you try to make it timely, when you try to give it a historical context, when you introduce extraneous elements which are not based on the text.



Hewes: If you're speaking of Tennessee Williams, fine; but this is a play which was written 70 years ago, 80 years ago.

Kalem: All of the most damaging things that have been done to Shakespeare have been done to plays that have been written 400 years ago. We've seen them, they haven't worked. None of those things actually enhance emotional or intellectual receptivity. If you say that we are to be thrilled in the theatre, then why not go to a massage parlor?

Simon: Well, you see, there is always one or another idiot premise at work here. Either the idiot premise is that the playwright didn't really manage to say everything that needs to be said on the subject, and that I, Peter Brook or I, Jerzy Grotowski or I, Andrei Serban—or whoever it is—have to sort of fill in all the lacunae that poor old Chekhov left out because he didn't know any better. Or the assumption is that, ah well, our audiences today, after all it's 70 years later or it's 700 years later or whatever, our audiences are not close to this, they don't understand this, we have to bring this closer to them.

Well, [that's true] if they're the kind of morons who can only understand things as Serban does. Ranevskaya speaks about how her son died, so now we have

a pantomime enacting the death of the son in the background—this is like those moronic television commercials where somebody says "If-you-have-a-head-ache-take-as-pir-in-tablets" and then there is writing on the screen that says "If-you-have-a-head-ache"—so if you are deaf or blind or dumb, you can still get the message. I don't want that theatre for deaf, dumb, blind and moronic idiots. I want a theatre for people who can think for themselves, who can feel for themselves, who can understand the power of suggestion, which is the greatest power that any artist has at his command.

Hewes: I don't think that the child walking across from the cherry orchard is a pantomime to illustrate what the words mean. I think that at the moment it appears, that's a moment in which the whole subject of the child has been brought up, and the people in the play are suddenly overwhelmed by this tragic image.

Simon: So, you have to act it out?

Hewes: No, there's no reason in the world why Serban cannot put what happens to be in the mind.

Simon: One very good reason, Henry, is that Chekhov did not put it there. And if Serban says, "I'm better than Chekhov," he can do it. But if he says that, he's a liar, a scoundrel, and a swindler—which he is in any case.

Hewes: He would never say that. I can't imagine him saying that anymore than I can imagine Brook saying he's better than Shakespeare.

Simon: Oh, that's what they all imply. Everyone of them thinks that he's a great genius. Why don't they write plays if they're so wonderful...if Serban can write a play?

Eder: I don't think the people who find value in Serban's presentation are saying that there is not a timeless value in a good traditional performance, and in the variations thereof. I don't think one thing excludes the other. But I don't think that one should take the opposite attitude and say that because there is value in a traditional performance that other ways can't be tried. These ways must stand and fall on their success, but not on the question of what would Chekhov have said. How do you know what Chekhov would have said?

Simon: Because Chekhov has said it in print, as plain as plain can be, and all you have to do is follow his instructions.

Eder: He has said a great many things. Do you, for example, believe that stage directions are as sacrosanct as text?



Simon: Well, it depends. If you have a stage direction by James Barrie, where he puts half the play into the stage direction in a way which is not in the text, in a way which cannot be acted out, then obviously a stage direction is not sacrosanct. But if the stage direction says, "Enter so and so, carrying a platter of fruit," and you have so and so entering on his head, juggling five balls with his feet, then that is sacrosanctness that should have been abided by. Yes.

Kalem: I think what John objects to and what I object to is the imposition of someone, who as nearly as we can make out, does not remotely have the aesthetic or emotional or intellectual calibre of the person who originated the work...who has turned that work upside down, merely for the sake of turning it upside down, merely for the sake of creating...what? A sensation? I mean, it's a shock effect, basically. It's an aesthetic shock effect, instead of using obscene words or nudity or whatever has also been used in the theatre in modern times.

Do we want, in fact, to have the highest works of art treated by people, who for some reason or other, don't humble themselves before these works, don't submerge themselves in the consciousness of the writer himself? I think of the director as a catalyst who's submersed himself in the work, and in the way that work was written. I think that that is the distillation which the classic master in the written arts always uses in the dramatic arts...to act as that catalyst, and then this torch is passed to the actors when they're on the stage. I don't ever want to see scenery, or a number of extraneous effects, imposing on the actor's attempt to reproduce the purity of the artist's intention insofar as the director's been able to convey.

Hewes: What I object to, in Ted and John, is jumping to the conclusion that if somebody does something onstage that is what you consider shocking or outrageous, you assume that they've done it just because they wanted to be shocking and outrageous...and not because they had some deeper reason for doing it.

Simon: No, that's not so.

Hewes: I don't say they always do, but because I am a Serban groupie, as John characterizes me—which means simply that I have followed his work—therefore I can make a considered judgment. If some other director who was more shallow were to do it, I might accept this characterization. But I don't think that Serban has people coming in and doing things that strike us as strange and un-nineteenth century Russian simply to shock us. I think he does it because he's trying to get at something that means something very deep to him, and that comes out of his work with the actors.

Bilowit: Richard has to leave. Is there any final comment?

Simon: My God, I feel I haven't even scratched the surface.

Hewes: You mean you've been holding your fire?



Simon: There's a perfectly good other possible reason. I don't think they necessarily do this transmogrifying in order to shock. Some of it is done out of plain stupidity. Let's not forget that alternative. Anyone who only responds to strong shocks, to strong blows, is an inferior specimen, who has to be hit on the head for the message to be communicated to him. That is the kind of direction that Serban gives.

Words alone don't mean anything. Gestures alone don't mean anything. Expressions alone don't...We have to do something big enough. We have to jump up and down like a goddamn jack-in-the-box. We have to make Dunyasha fall three times in a row and do a strip tease while falling down fainting in order to convey some idiotic thing that in that way alone becomes meaningful to Mr. Serban...Well, that may be good for his retarded sensibilities, but it's not what I want from the theatre.

All right, let's take this much lauded entrance of Firs, for example, which I think is a grotesque, insolent piece of stupidity. In comes Firs in an 18th century costume, for which there's no justification whatsoever. He is played by a funny little pederast who is hopping around and doing a kind of off-Broadway musical number—that is not in

Critics' Roundtable "CHERRY ORCHARD"

Chekhov—which he sings to himself. And he does a funny little two-step or fox trot or something, and he improvises this stupid little song, and he's full of sort of effete vim and vigor as he comes in there. Now, what has this to do with Chekhov?

Firs is supposed to be a poor old dying man. Why? Because that will make it particularly touching later on when this poor old dying man is concerned over Gayev catching a cold. Here's a man who is ever so much nearer the grave than Gayev is, but it is the loyalty of the old servant, the pathetic and deeply moving loyalty of the old servant, that despite the fact that he is almost dead, he is worried about Gayev catching cold, who he still sees as a child who he was responsible for as a servant.

But if it is a funny little fag who does little musical comedy numbers, offering a coat to this other guy, and if the offering of a coat is turned into a cute little farcical number in which people chase each other around a bench and do a kind of Olsen and Johnson routine while they're doing it, then the whole message, the whole meaning, the whole human simplicity and pathos of this old old man worrying about someone else when he should be wondering about himself, is totally lost. And people who admire that, are admiring it out of perversity or out of stupidity or out of trendiness. There is no other possible reason.

Eder: As an admirer of that scene, for whatever motives you ascribe, I agree actually with your definition of what Firs should be; but I think that Firs, as played, has admirably and rather unconventionally emphasized the elements of frailty. Do you think senility doesn't have gaiety to it? Do you think it doesn't have celebration? Do you think that the man's utter joy and the means he represents aren't the best sign in the world that this house is going to fall, and that there is something unstable there, and that the old man himself is dying?

Old things don't always die grey, sometimes they die in a burst of light. Firs is a particular representation of feebleness, and I think he does it very well and very originally.

Simon: Well, I don't know. All I can say is that I have watched old men and old women all my life, for one reason or another, and I have never, never, never seen one behave like that. And when you show me even one, I will defer to you. But until then, I'm afraid I won't.

Kalem: I'm disturbed by something else. I don't suppose I've seen more than four CHERRY ORCHARD's... I've never been at one [before this] in which I was not moved at any moment throughout the entire production. And to me, that was damning just in terms of my own response, because I think I'm excessively emotional.



Simon: But let's get down to specifics. Look how this magpie scavenges around. The ending, that idiotic ending with that little child coming in with a cherry branch, a little kewpie doll there at the end. That is a steal from a number of Paris opera productions, and to transfer this Paris opera style of ending certain nineteenth century operas, and to put this onto Chekhov, is absurd. Now the business of horseplay throughout, especially the first act, but also later in the second act, this is a direct steal from the ACT production of this play done in San Francisco... Now the toys, these old Russian toys and the way they're sort of brought in by way of punctuation, so much admired by Dick, that is a direct steal from the production at the Piccolo Teatro Di Milano. And so on down the line.

Eder: But what difference does this make? Shakespeare was a magpie.

Simon: That is different. Shakespeare is entirely different.

Eder: Ah! It is not different. The question is what effect do these things have and how does he use them? If he uses them effectively, the fact that he did not invent them is pretty irrelevant.

Simon: A playwright is not the same as a director. Otherwise you can say that what applies to a brick layer also applies to a sculptor. Surely you would not say that.

Eder: But the importance of originality is certainly about the same.

Simon: No, no... It is always a most dangerous thing to cite Shakespeare as an example, because Shakespeare is the towering genius who is the exception

to all rules. And what Shakespeare can do, almost nobody else has ever been able to do.

Eder: Yes, but to state categorically that the fact that these elements may have been used elsewhere, ipso facto damns a production, is not enough. It would damn it indeed, if these were borrowed in a way that were arbitrary and didn't work. Although, it makes the discussion more interesting that we seem to be dragged in total pros and total cons, I'm not a total pro. I am a total supporter of Serban. I think he is one of the most interesting directors around. I think he has made mistakes in this play. There are things that don't work, but I think there is enough that does work to make it fascinating and valid. Not definitive, but valid.

Bilowit: Don't you agree with Richard that it doesn't matter who it's borrowed from, if it works, it's all right?

Kalem: I have to agree with John. If a playwright is borrowing from someone and utilizing it—I mean, Brecht borrowed from Shakespeare and made reasonable use of it. But when a director does it, we are in a different room. I guess I'm very much opposed to the idea of a Hollywood mentality descending on the theatre with the director becoming more or less totalitarian. I mean, I think Brook is totalitarian. His actors move around like automatons. I don't think I want that. I want to feel that the actor actually is holding his role within his own being, and I don't want to feel that he's just doing something that's all been tracked out for him.

Hewes: I think it's ironic that you've picked these two examples of dictators to actors, because they both work more with improvisation, more using what the actor brings to the role, than most directors.

Kalem: Well, I may be wrong in that respect, except that I think they finally impose a certain conception on it, which is not necessarily what the playwright...

Hewes: They edit it.

Kalem: They edit it, yes. Well, once in a while you have great editing, that's when Pound edited Eliot. That was probably great editing. But when a senior editor of Time edits you, you may find that...

Hewes: I think that's something we can all agree on—our antipathy for editors.

Eder: I must leave.

Kalem: I think we've said enough.

Simon: It's a beginning...

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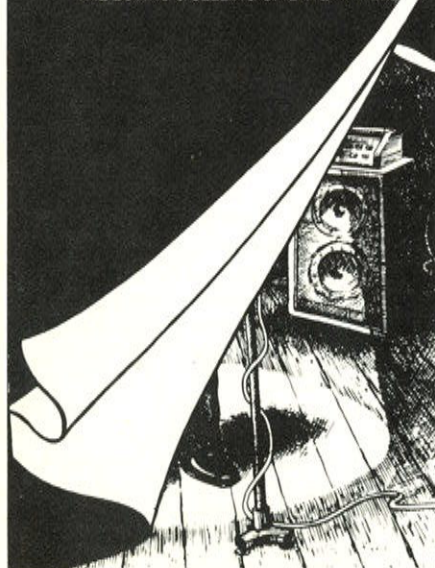
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A NON-VERBAL APPROACH TO CHEKHOV

DAN ISAAC interviews
ANDREI SERBAN



ANDREI SERBAN with JOSEPH PAPP

Isaac: You've established a reputation for transforming the spoken word into a kind of emotive music. Why did you want to do a realistic play like *THE CHERRY ORCHARD* where the spoken word is so important?

Serban: I don't want to stay in one direction. I want to move to something else. Realism is not just what the mind grasps. That is surface realism, what is talked about in universities. In *CHERRY ORCHARD* there is the world of emotion, vibrations, a larger realism than something enclosed in space. Real without *ism*!

Isaac: I understand that in the rehearsal process for *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*, you had the text read aloud off-stage while the actors walked and felt their way through the play without the initial burden of memorizing lines. Is this the way you always work with a text?

Serban: Just for this production. Critics have a hard time understanding me because I do not stay the same. I did *AS YOU LIKE IT* out-of-doors in France. It had no relation to anything else I've done. It was like a feast in the country.

Isaac: I know you used *animal* improvisations with the actors. What other improvisations did you use?

Serban: We did long improves on the arrivals in the first act. I asked everyone to imagine who met them at the station. And who did they sit with in the carriage? How did it feel to see the orchard? To smell the orchard? Then we did the departures of the last act. We did what nobody ever does—work on the emotions of the characters *after* they are off stage and the play is over. We wrote the fifth act of *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*. Varya becomes a nun, but a *true* nun. Trofimov becomes a Leninist and swallows up Lopahkin. And

Yasha becomes a Stalinist and swallows up Trofimov.

Isaac: Did any of the actors feel threatened by this approach in rehearsals?

Serban: No problems. Everyone was marvelous. I had to say to them: We have to stop and do the blocking... which at that point was everyone's last wish.

Isaac: About the set—was it your conception, or Santo Loquasto's? Did the actors have a clear concept of the space they would be working in?

Serban: Santo Loquasto and I sat down and we discussed the concept of the set together. The set did not come until the last week of rehearsal. We improvised around what we believed it would be. The set is always a lottery. We didn't know what would come from the workshop. But it was 90% of what we expected.

Isaac: Critics have remarked on how well you used the stage space of the Vivian Beaumont. Did you spend a long time studying the theatre?

Serban: Playing in Europe I have worked in much larger areas. In ruins. In fields. That's how I learned to use space. As soon as I saw the theatre, I knew what I wanted to do. In five minutes.

Isaac: Concerning liberties that you have taken with the text, I was greatly disturbed with the second act ending, where you had Charlotta and Firs alone on stage in an embrace.

Serban: The meeting of Charlotta and Firs at the end of act two is in the original text, but Stanislavsky took it out. Charlotta's trick in act one is also in the original text.

Isaac: What about Irene Worth's famous run around the room just before her last exit?

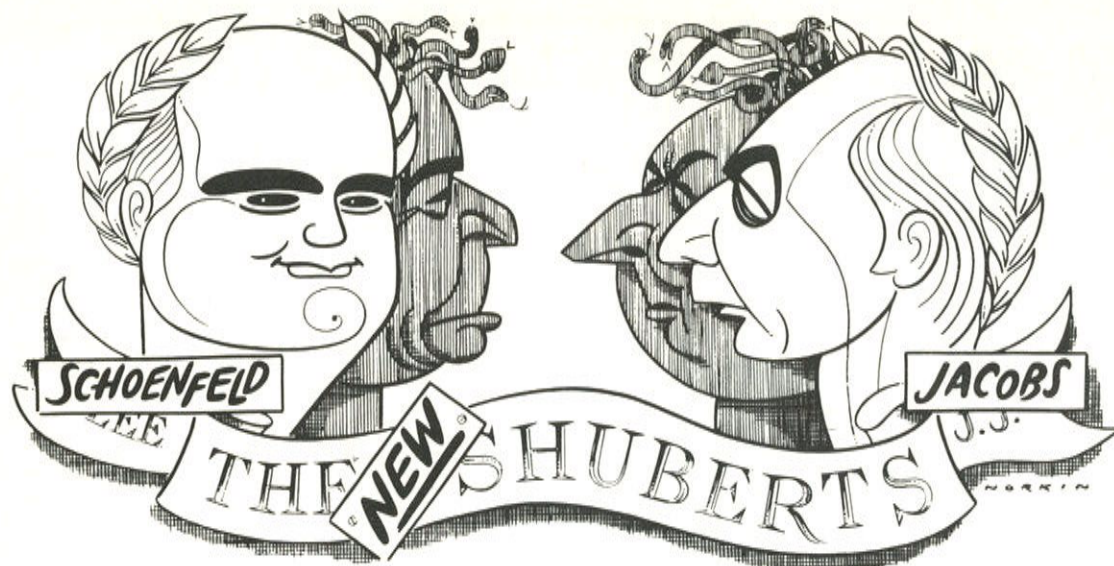
Serban: It was my idea to put that in. I told her, I want you to play the exit merry. Chekhov said in a letter that all of act four should be merry and giddy.

Isaac: How do you feel about the various reviews of the critics?

Serban: The negative reviews attract me more. Of course I like the positive reviews. I read them, I feel good. But the negative reviews excite me to polemic. That is why I enjoy them more. Except with Erika Munk, which was only insult. What is the reason for sarcasm and insult in criticism? I don't understand it. Why should I do such a masochistic thing as take a play I don't like? I wanted to serve Chekhov. What I did was no sacrilege. But I don't want to put it on in the English tradition with people sitting on stuffed chairs.

Isaac: What did you learn from this production?

Serban: (A long pause.) To try to be freer than I was. More cinematic. To go beyond.



Illustrations by Sam Norkin
Photos by Gerry Goodstein

by TOM MCMORROW
(Feature Writer, New York Daily News)

Once upon a time, in the fairy tale land of Broadway, there was an ogre named Shubert. Like all the worst ogres, he had two heads, one of which you addressed as "Mr. J.J.", the other as "Mr. Lee". In 1977, before the astonished eyes of the people of Broadway, the ogre is turning into the fairy godmother.

The creature still has two heads, one now round and jovial and called Gerald Schoenfeld, the other long-faced and saturnine, called Bernard Jacobs. They were once the Shuberts' lawyers. They are now The Shuberts. The New York theatre, which has seen P. T. Barnum, Harry Houdini and THE MAGIC SHOW, has produced no spectacle more extraordinary than this metamorphosis.

In his autobiographical sketch in "Who's Who in America," J.J. Shubert made no mention of a mother, confirming the suspicion of those who believed he was not of woman born. But while he cultivated a reputation as a hard article while brother Lee played the suave role, there was loathing aplenty for both. The legend is that an actor was walking along Broadway, distraction in his aspect, fuming, "The bastard!" when another actor passing in the opposite direction said, "So is his brother."

They were born in poverty in Syracuse, the sons of a Lithuanian notions peddler. "When you are struggling for survival as they did," says Gerald Schoenfeld, "you become different from other people. When you take off your shoes when you go into the house so the leather won't wear out, and you see your sister die of malnutrition, it has to affect you."

Jacob and Lee idolized their older brother Sam, who helped support them by selling candy and tickets to local entertainments and then started managing small theatrical companies touring the area. In 1900, the three of them headed for New York

City to seek their fortune, and took over the management of the Herald Square Theatre. Sam was 25, J. J. 20, and Lee 17.

The Theatrical Syndicate, a cartel of six businessmen, held all of American show business in an iron grip at that time. In 1896 they had pooled their holdings, ownership or control of 33 theatres, and before they were through they controlled between 700 and 800 theatres from coast to coast. You did business on their harsh terms or your show didn't get into a theatre. Many stars, including Sarah Bernhardt, fought them by staging their performances under circus tents. By the time the boys from Syracuse came along looking for money, the Syndicate had so antagonized everyone that the theatre's major investors, who were also among the city's social leaders, welcomed them as an alternative to the crass and grasping image the Syndicate had given the theatre.

In 1905, as the brothers were beginning to make serious inroads on the Syndicate's monopoly, tragedy struck them a ferocious blow. Sam, their certified genius, was killed in a gory railroad wreck outside Chicago. The younger men were profoundly affected, and as they carried on, they dedicated their efforts to his memory, trying to adopt his mannerisms and hanging his picture in the lobby of every theatre they opened. They never traveled together again, and J. J. developed such a dread of sudden accidental death that he would never sit under the balcony overhang in a theatre for fear that it would collapse and fall on him.

The brothers admired and imitated the example of Flo Ziegfeld and his FOLLIES, jumping into major musical production themselves with THE PASSING SHOW OF 1912, using a mix of gifted comedians and nubile feminine flesh in opulent settings. Their shows brought to stardom such as the mad, mad brothers, Willie and Eugene Howard, and Marilyn Miller. "They succeeded because of solid

theatrical instinct . . . and a platoon of the shoddiest popular hits ever produced out of one office, along with revivals. No show was too empty-headed for them," says author Ethan Mordden in "Better Foot Forward". Among the less than deathless Shubert extravaganzas were CHINESE HONEYMOON, WINSOME WINNIE, THE GIRLS OF HOLLAND and a musical version of THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL called LADY TEAZLE, with Lillian Russell playing Lady Teazle to a fizzle.

One of the smartest Shubert moves was signing up an ambitious young Hungarian engineer named Sigmund Romberg to write music for their shows. Romberg's MAYTIME was such a smash that it began to cause the brothers a special kind of anguish. The sight of would-be customers being turned down and walking away from the box office with the cash still bulging in their wallets gave them a stabbing pain in the region of the heart. Their solution was simple and typically bold. They opened another production of MAYTIME across the street, and the two companies ran at the Shubert and the old 44th Street Theatre for almost a year.

In the booming 1920s, the Shuberts capitalized on the fact that building and owning theatres was a more lucrative real estate practice than putting up apartment houses or office buildings: in a legit theatre, built for a million dollars, a hit show could gross a million in its first year—and the theatre owner got 40% of the gross. And if the owner were also the producer . . . They put up a flock of them around Times Square.

Tough but practical to the core, the brothers followed a dictum expressed by Lee in speaking of a notoriously temperamental star: "Never have anything to do with that son of a bitch, unless you need him." Of the actors looking for a job, J. J. said: "You could spit in their face and they'll say it's rain."

Richard Rodgers told what it was like, as a young composer, to play an audition for Lee Shubert, whom he described as a sort of granite-visaged Sitting Bull: "His leathery face, protruding nose, slicked-down black hair and impassive, stony stare gave him the look of an Indian chief. I had been warned that an audition for him was an experience, and indeed it was." The worst of the experience, as it turned out, was that in the middle of the third song, *Sitting Bull* began to snore.

The most popular nasty crack about theatre owners is, "They have no creative ability, and the money to prove it." But if not creative, the Shuberts were certainly innovative. And they had the ability to recognize a good thing, especially a good formula. Eyeing the strong business done by the B. F. Keith vaudeville circuit, they originated the tab show, a cut-down version of a Broadway revue that would tour as the second half of a show whose first half would consist of standard vaudeville acts. The musical director and pit conductor of their first, *SNAPSHOTS OF 1921*, was Richard Rodgers, age 19.

Their favorite formula was commissioning the biography of a composer, with his music providing the score. For these, epics as hokey as anything Hollywood ever produced were created. At the end of *BLOSSOM TIME*, Franz Schubert on his deathbed, calls weakly for paper and pen, composes "Ave Maria", and expires. For *WHITE LILACS*, the story of Chopin, J. J. had this great idea; he described it to Odette Myrtil, who was to play Chopin's beloved, George Sand. "He composes this tune, hands it to George Sand, and she plays it on her violin."

"But J. J.," she protested, "George Sand didn't play the violin."

Said J. J.: "Who'll know?"

As the brothers' empire grew, with Shubert Theatres in Philadelphia, Boston and other cities, besides the 16 in New York, so did their renown as S.O.B.'s. For their production of *THE ZIEGFELD FOLLIES OF 1934*, they hired Harry Kaufman to be a front man as "producer", because they were aware of their reputation, and they felt he could attract people who would have nothing to do with them.

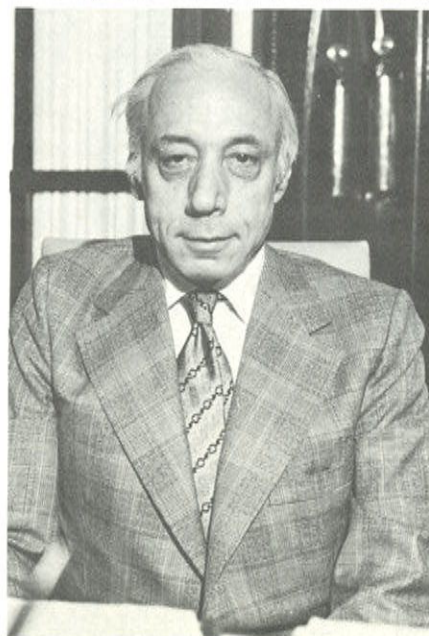
Producer Harry Rigby is one who feels their S.O.B. image has been overdone. "Sure, they were hard men," he says, "but

let's remember that they did keep all those theatres going during the Depression. They went bankrupt, came back and raised fresh money and bought back their theatres. And they didn't sell out to movie interests. They gave the legitimate theatre a place to play during those bad years, and for that service alone they should be remembered with gratitude."

Lee Shubert died in 1963 at 78. Old J. J. went to his reward in 1973, aged 86. Describing the turnout for his funeral, an acquaintance said, "You could have held it in a telephone booth." Behind them they left the remains of an empire that at its peak had been worth \$400 million, owned 150 theatres, and had 7,000 employees.

J. J.'s son, John, had died of a heart attack in 1962, so it was an empire without a direct heir. The business was taken over by its attorneys, Jacobs and Schoenfeld, and Irving Goldman, head of the Shubert Foundation. A stormy period followed. Goldman was indicted on charges of bribery and perjury, and dismissed by the foundation the next day. And perhaps even more shocking to the public was the next development: Lawrence Shubert Lawrence, grandnephew of the empire-builders, was forced off the board of directors.

Proving they could be as tough-minded



BERNARD JACOBS



GERALD SCHOENFELD

as the brothers they had served, the attorneys charged Lawrence with incompetence, and got a vote of the corporation's directors to have him removed. Now it was a Shubert Organization without a single Shubert.

Bernard Jacobs was asked what the grounds were for the ousting of Lawrence, who had been an English major at the University of Pennsylvania, and is an avid student of Shakespeare. "The man's abilities and his shortcomings are well-known in the business," he said, "and I don't think it would be appropriate for me to make any comment about him."

Inquiries of Broadway producers brought the explanation from one (who wished to remain anonymous) that the gentleman was undone by villainous bartenders, who kept slipping bad ice cubes into his liquor. Another, Harry Rigby, said, "He always had six people with him; he was a walking board meeting. Gerry and Bernie don't believe in doing things by a committee; they believe a straight line is the shortest distance between two points."

As they took over, Schoenfeld and Jacobs could hardly have had a worse image. The public considered them scheming lawyers who had forced out a rightful heir, forgetting that they were not depriving that heir of any of his inherited wealth, just of the right to participate in running the business, a function which is always determined by a board of directors. Their detractors in the theatre referred to them scornfully as "The Lawyers", with the inference that they knew nothing about theatre.

That this was unfair has been amply demonstrated over the past five years. They are indignant about it. "When we took over in 1972," said Gerald Schoenfeld, "I had been associated with the Shuberts for 23 years, as personal lawyer for J. J. and John, and Bernie had been with them 15 years. If you represented J. J., you had to be there morning, noon and night. And to defend them in an anti-trust suit, which we did, you had to know every minute detail of the business. I'd like to match my knowledge with one of those people who say we're not theatre men."

If their previous experience was chiefly in the courtroom, representing the highly litigious Shuberts, they have, since assuming control, certainly demonstrated that it



equipped them to be enlightened managers. To measure their effect on the business precisely is impossible, but it is a fact that in the years of their regime the theatre has risen from its deepest depression to the heights of its greatest financial boom.

The partners sat in Schoenfeld's handsome office above the Shubert Theatre and discussed their experience. "Some reporter wrote about me, 'He sat back in J.J.'s chair and smiled,'" Schoenfeld said. "It happens that I bought this chair". He scowled, but only momentarily. His round face is normally as cheerful as a Smile button, and every cast member of A CHORUS LINE, an entertainment being presented downstairs, is known to him on a first-name basis. Jacobs sat staring gloomily as their success was analyzed, but he does everything gloomily. "We call him Smiley," Harry Rigby says. "He always walks in looking like he's just been told the human race has 24 hours to live."

"In 1972 Broadway was in the cemetery," Jacobs said sepulchraly, "and the Road was already in the crematorium. We put in money and encouraged people like Mike Nichols, George C. Scott, Larry Gelbart and Arthur Penn to come back to Broadway."

"We went at the problem from several angles," Schoenfeld said, "investing millions in productions, looking for plays that would develop new audiences, funding projects like the half-price Times Square ticket booth; becoming active in cleaning up the theatre district. The organization has also been the prime mover for a strong League of New York Theatres and Producers. We program our efforts through them, and they are now a strong advocacy organization, where they used to be just labor contract negotiators. Starting in February, 1976 we got the League to collect an assessment from its members of \$400 a week for each drama and \$600 for each musical, for special projects. In the first year we raised \$450,000 for that fund." Schoenfeld is chairman of the League's special projects committee.

"Almost every play that's running, we did something for," Jacobs said glumly. "Just start down the street here with THE WIZ. 20th Century-Fox, which was backing it, was running out of steam in Detroit. It was obvious that the play, in the state it was in, could not make it on Broadway. They wanted to bring it into New York and start playing previews; we talked them out of it. We let them move into our theatre in Philadelphia—at our risk. We guaranteed them against losses in Philly, and we took a \$35,000 loss there; we also

absorbed subsequent losses the first weeks in New York. But we believed in the play."

"THE WIZ was the first non-message black play," Schoenfeld said. "Even PURLIE had a message; this was pure fun, with great potential for black audience development, so we gave it our best theatre, the Majestic. Gordon Stanfield of Fox had lost confidence in the show; they had already dropped a million-two. I'm not saying that he was fired over it, but for whatever reason, 20th let him go."

THE WIZ received mixed reviews on Broadway and was running at a loss in its third week when Jacobs noted a phenomenon, a \$9,000 advance at the ticket window, that decided him on a bold move. He called the show's general manager and said, "20th is sitting on its ass. We will put up \$100,000 for television commercials in return for a half-interest in the show."

"Naturally, they screamed," he said. "They're out \$1.2 million, and I want half the show for a hundred thousand. But I told them plainly: 'This way you'll have 50% of something. The way it is, you have 100% of nothing.' Well, they thought it over, and decided that if we were willing to risk a hundred thousand, they would risk it. They did, and the show became a hit. . . . It would have been something, owning half of that show for a hundred thousand." He almost smiled.



Other youth-oriented shows they have helped have been GREASE and THE MAGIC SHOW, big winners, and losers, THE HARRY CHAPIN SHOW and TRUCKLOAD. "In nine out of 10 cases where we're involved, our name does not appear in the program," Schoenfeld said. "We do not demand billing unless it's actually our production, like SLY FOX, YOUR ARMS TOO SHORT TO BOX WITH GOD or SHERLOCK HOLMES."

"Hal Prince came in a few years back

and told us he was short \$200,000 for A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC," he said. "We put it up. In July 1972 Stuart Ostrow was \$225,000 short out of \$500,000 he needed to put on PIPPIN. We got him together with Roger Stevens, who invested 100,000, we put up 50,000, and told Stu he'd have to raise the remaining 75,000 himself, and he did. Our total investments in 4½ years have been 4½ million dollars. Those are the big numbers. On the smaller end, when the Sanitation Department said they couldn't clean up the area because they didn't have the street-sweeping machines and the city is broke, we bought them two of them for \$7,000."

Producer Morton Gottlieb says, "The wonderful thing about these men is that you can trust them, and that includes when they're in the driver's seat. I started in the theatre of the old Shuberts, and they would take cruel advantage of the inexperienced. As a young manager, I would say to them in my innocence, 'Tell me what you think is fair,' and you can be sure they were exchanging glances behind my back. Then they would impose terribly harsh terms. These men have created a climate of trust that's been foreign to the theatre, and I don't just mean with the Shuberts, for four decades."

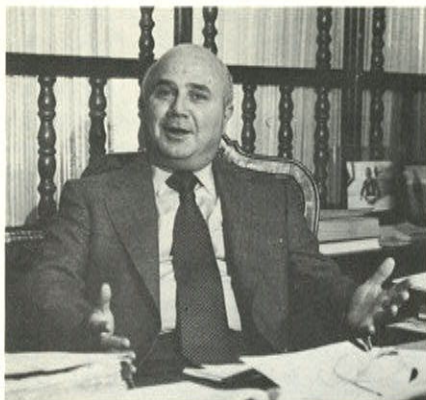
If you are a Shubert, whether by blood or by Organization, your interests extend far beyond Broadway. "In 1972 there was no Road at all," Schoenfeld said. "Theatres were closing all over. And we were opening the Shubert in Los Angeles. It looked like a place where you could lose a million dollars a year for 30 years, but we made it work, and now it's the one theatre in the United States in which a musical can count on an open-end run. Then Feuer and Martin took over the L. A. Civic Light Opera and made that into a professional operation. Also, Atlanta is coming on, so is Houston, Dallas . . ."

"Chicago!" Jacobs broke in grimly. "Chicago is having its first decent season in 12 years. We have the Shubert and the Blackstone there, and Jimmy Nederlander has the Erie Crown, a huge house, and also theatres in L. A. and St. Louis and San Francisco, and he's going to open more. The road is booming," he groaned.

A CHORUS LINE is their pride and joy. "We've been interested in that show since its inception, before it was ever on a stage," Schoenfeld said.

I asked them about the bad period, marked by inferior performances, that the Broadway production went through after 13 of the original 17 dancer-actors were yanked from the cast to open the show in L.A.

"Had to do it," said Schoenfeld firmly. "It was a gamble we had to take, even though we might hurt the New York company for a while. Because L.A. is a special case. It's a city with a big ego. They will never accept being a Second City, which Chicago has more or less become resigned to over the years. If you send L.A. anything



but the very best, they will clobber you. We insisted to Joe Papp that he had to send the original company; he did, and L.A. was ecstatic. Last week we did \$199,000 there."

The insistence on quality must have rung strangely to the walls that had heard the planning of the great George Sand fiddle-playing number. "Our policy is against sending out so-called second class companies," Schoenfeld said. "In the past, Boston critics have slammed us, and they were right, for sending them mediocre or cut-down casts. We don't do that any more. We'd just as soon be dark. Last year we sent out a TV star in the tour of a Broadway hit. We made big money with him, but we caught it from the critics, because he just wasn't suited for the role. We'll never do that again."

The organization is active in Boston, Chicago and other cities in the same way it is in New York, he said, helping set up cut-rate ticket plans like the Times Square TKTS booth, working with the community in each city to improve its theatrical district, and with producers to develop new audiences.

"In 1972 the theatre had a dying audience," Schoenfeld said, "all-white, all over 50; in a whole theatre, not one young person, not one black. We have searched out plays that will attract those audiences."

"You can sit in a theatre," Jacobs said, "and see that the audience is elated, even though you personally may not be. When we see that chemistry, we must take a chance on the play, though we know that some of them will fail."

They are already looking forward to the 1977-78 Broadway season. "Liza Minnelli is coming in in a show which may be titled NIGHTCLUB, Schoenfeld said, "which we'll be doing jointly with the L. A. Civic Light Opera. We'll be co-producing a new Arnold Wesker play called THE MERCHANT, starring Zero Mostel; also, the musical version of the old movie 20TH CENTURY. Hal Prince will direct a new musical, SWEENEY TODD, taken from an old English play—next year will be even better than this!"

His round countenance glowed at the prospect. "Broadway has once again become regarded as the place to come back to," he said, and at that, even Smiley smiled.

People Who Make Theatre

JULES FEIFFER'S APPROACH TO PLAYWRITING: SMALL TENSIONS MAKE BIG PLAYS

"I know what I want to do in theatre, but often that is very different from what I end up seeing (onstage). More and more, I like to work in the area of *relationships* and in the *details* of living. I would like to eventually find a way of writing a play in which absolutely nothing happens. Nothing important transpires other than a small petty argument between a husband or wife or between parents and children. No different from one's normal daily routine or what one may see on a soap opera. And yet, I want to create in the audience all the suspense of a Hitchcock film."

Jules Feiffer, erstwhile cartoonist and evolving playwright, is talking about his ideal play, the one which someday he would like to write. "I realize how often within me there can be extraordinary tensions in the course of a day." Everyone is familiar with these tensions, the result of minor crises which, individually, are totally insignificant. And yet, they build one on top of another, until all you want to do is grab the next airplane to Tahiti and hide out until they blow over. This tension, over infinitely small issues, and the release of it, is what Feiffer wants to recreate in theatrical terms.

This concept is not new to Jules Feiffer, but rather, something towards which he seems to have been reaching throughout his professional career. His *Village Voice* cartoons, for instance, demonstrate the beginnings of this idea. His characters were not developed out of preconceived models or situations, but as the excuse for a joke, a "release of tension over... a small issue," as it were. The familiar characterizations, Bernard or the dancer for example, developed only after they had become the center of several jokes. Always the joke, the small issue, remained central.

The cartoons, however, according to Feiffer, were not small enough, not involved enough in the "details of living." So, the goal persisted, as Feiffer added playwrighting to his accomplishments. And though quiet, it rumbled beneath CARNAL KNOWLEDGE, LITTLE MURDERS, and THE WHITE HOUSE MURDER CASE.

However, because these plays were, as he calls them, "dramatic essays", he had to invent characters to fit a theme. And although there were times when the characters got away from him and went their own way, for the most part, their existence was justified by how well they illustrated his point.

It was not until KNOCK, KNOCK, when he "got tired of exploiting the characters" in this way, that he began to put his theory of working primarily with *relationships* to work. Here, he invented two characters, two old men who existed for their own sakes; he put them in a room and allowed them simply to "go at each other", to "develop lives and interests that weren't planned ahead of time." They justified their own existence by the very act of being. They did not need to make a point in order to live.

Then, when it came time to set forth his theme, Feiffer introduced St. Joan, a fantastically unreal character. And Joan, being unreal, made the old men more real, as she and her effect on them gave their *relationship* even more validity. She pointed up their fear of change, the necessity for all of us to risk change, even if it means destruction. And then, having accomplished her goal, she rose up to heaven summarizing her attitude towards life all the way.

"Joan's final speech, which was described by critics as simply a Polonius speech, isn't that at all," explains Feiffer. "It's really a detailed description of the difficulty of day to day living; that the problem of solving a problem is that it creates other problems." Here again, the emphasis is on the *details* of living.

Which brings us to HOLD ME! Feiffer's latest theatrical endeavor, an evening of serio-comic vignettes. Even a brief look at these sketches shows us how Feiffer is concentrating on the details of living, on small moments and on apparently insignificant day to day episodes. And although the actual dialogue is derived from his cartoons, Feiffer and director Caymichael Patten have attempted to give the "play", as he likes to hear it called, dramatic form.

"Does HOLD ME! provide an answer to your ideal play?" I asked.

"Yes, except that even HOLD ME! is larger than I would like. I would like to get those moments even smaller," he laughs. Then he adds, "I hope I get away with it. I'm sure if it's as good as I want it to be, it'll have a lot of trouble getting good critical responses — until it's revived five years later."

DEBBI WASSERMAN

WHAT DOES A DIRECTOR DO?

by ALAN SCHNEIDER

"Don't all of (pause . . .) Samuel Beckett's plays have very elaborate and detailed stage directions?" one of my friendly neighborhood critics asked me the evening my latest Beckett trio opened in Washington.

"Yes, they (pause . . .) certainly do."

"And those three heads stuck in those, uh, marvelous looking urns? [Beckett's entire setting for one of the plays, called *PLAY*.] That means that you didn't have to think about any actual movements?"

"That's, uh, right."

"Well, excuse my asking, Alan, but what do you *do*?"

The answer is: I often wonder. (Especially with drama critics.) Directing for the stage is an art—a craft, a process, a phenomenon, a mystery—not easily described or defined, or understood. Although everyone tries. Including critics, friends, strangers, ordinary theatre-goers, and even directors themselves.

One of my older and wiser colleagues once said somewhere (or should have) that a director has to be a combination traffic cop, tourist guide, choreographer, lion tamer, trial lawyer, magician, psychiatrist, baby-sitter, and con man—not in alphabetical order. Among other things.

For what a director does, basically, is take the playwright's bare words, together with his stage directions (which may range from Shaw's page-length essays on social conditions through Beckett's well-known array of specific instructions and varied-length pauses to Pinter's even more elliptical dots—and dashes) and try to clothe them in flesh and blood reality. That reality, of course, determined largely by how the actors look, behave, move, and perform. Also shaped by the setting, costumes, lighting, sound effects (musical or otherwise), stage size and height, timing of scene and act endings, everything which the audience sees and hears. Someone (or several someones) has to decide all those seemingly insignificant but quite critical matters, and that someone, in our present-day theatre, is usually the director. In Harold Clurman's understanding phrase, the director is the "author of the stage performance".

The contemporary director, in theory, decides everything, from the gestures of the leading lady (as well as her jewelry and hairdo) to the color of the wallpaper. In practice, leading ladies (and men) have their own gestures, preferences in jewelry and hairdoes, and wills of their own. And

scene designers, accomplished and not, have been known to go off on their own favorite shades and tones. But then, it is generally the director who has, after all, chosen the designer—and the leading lady. Though not always. More importantly, it is the director whose job it is to give the designer and leading lady the confidence to be both cooperative and independently creative.

Most importantly, it is the director who, at the very beginning of the entire adventure, decides on the concept, the idea from which the entire production evolves and flows. It is he who interprets the play as being basically comedic or farcical, tragic or merely melodramatic; the story of a marriage which is doomed but doesn't know it, or the story of a doomed marriage trying to save itself. The first thing I write on the blank pages of my production notebook is not where someone is sitting or moving, but what the play is "about", as well as what its tone or texture should be.

Albee's *AMERICAN DREAM*, I once wrote, was a "cartoon sketch dealing with the hollowness of our current existence". That is, not only "hollow" but "a cartoon". *VIRGINIA WOOLF* was "a dark legend of truth and illusion, musical in its structure and style". Not at all realistic—how could they all sail past all those drinks? *THE BALLAD OF A SAD CAFE* was a prose-poem about the search for love in a world which denies it, *A DELICATE BALANCE* about the limits of responsibility. Winnie's absolute necessity as she sank further and further into the sands of *HAPPY DAYS* was "to live". On the frontispiece of the script for my recent Juilliard Theatre Center production of *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*, I wrote, "This is a play about Change and how it destroys the Beautiful." Then, waxing poetic, "Time, that great robber, steals from us all." *PLAY* was "Last Year in Marienbad in an Urn." And so on. Sometimes for myself only. Sometimes to share with the cast. Sometimes for the program notes. But always there, to think about and consider at each moment of choice. And ultimately to determine the production.

It is, then, this concept, this specific approach to a given play's very much non-fixed subject matter and manner, which is the director's main concern—and contribution. This is what reveals and represents his sensitivity, his degree and range of insight, his parabola of understanding of the

human experiences involved—both his and the play's. It is his task to fulfill that concept, felt or unfelt, expressed in words or not articulated except somewhere in his unconscious.

As his first responsibility, the director works on the play with its producer and author, cutting or adding for clarity or emphasis, tightening or expanding, connecting, intensifying, suggesting variations or extensions of the author's basic material. He may end up, after weeks or months of work, with only a few small but vital changes, but with a greater understanding of the play on both sides. Or he may wind up with a whole series of new scenes or even a new act (as in the case of my first Broadway production, in which the producer and I literally improvised and then wrote down large sections of a third act which the author was, for various reasons, unable himself to complete. (In texture, that third act did not differ greatly from the first two.)

Then, once the script is ready for production, the director strives to determine the proper physical and psychological environment within which the play should take place; that is, its physical shape and style. A realistic setting and background or something more impressionistic or abstract. "I want it to be poetic," I told my *CHERRY ORCHARD* designer, "impermanent, transparent, so that the changes between acts happen like a film dissolve, thus stressing the basic lack of stability in the environment."

And, in the meantime, in the absence of permanent companies or theatres, the director chooses his performers from among those who are both suitable and available. A new team for every ball game, with a short-stop and a second baseman who may never have played together before. Casting well or "properly" means casting creatively in such a way as to deepen and enlarge the playwright's own creations of human character and behavior—as Laurette Taylor's presence did for Williams' original *MENAGERIE*, or Brando for *STREETCAR*, or Diane Ladd and Fred Gwynne (and the entire supporting company) for *A TEXAS TRILOGY*. And casting skillfully is more than half the director's battle; it represents choosing the proper battlefield on which he will win or lose.

Casting a new play often determines not only its success or failure, but its very na-

ture. While casting a revival (hateful word!), for example, Elizabeth Ashley in the Barbara Bel Geddes role in *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF*, or George Grizzard or Eva Le Gallienne as the theatrical archetypes in a new version of *ROYAL FAMILY*, not only stems from a new interpretation (as well as the workings of that great theatrical god, Necessity, the availability of certain desired actors and actresses), but may reflect shifting values and attitudes towards the play itself. Is *GOLDEN BOY*, as Clurman asks, a play about a prize fighter who wants to be a violinist, or a violinist who wants to be a prize fighter? Depends less on Clifford Odets' original intention than it does on the casting.

A play is not fundamentally a sequence of words or speeches but, rather, a mosaic, a fabric of relationships, situations, events. What we, thanks primarily to Mr. C. Stanislavski, call "actions" or "intentions"—the various characters' desires and needs, interlocking, affecting, colliding with and shaping other characters' desires or needs. Somebody decides all that; and, again that somebody is—or should be—the director.

A play is like a recipe; it doesn't come to life until it's in the oven. Our particular oven in the theatre is the rehearsal period; and the director happens to be chief cook (the metaphor is inadequate because he is dealing with active rather than passive—and relatively stable—ingredients). In the case of a play, the possibilities, combinations, and permutations are infinitely more variable, subtle, intangible, even accidental. As well as alive. That is why no two performances, not to mention two productions, of the same play are ever exactly the same.

And the most alive of all the elements are the performers, who during the period of rehearsal—on the commercial theatre's assembly line, much too short and much too hurried—even if they are trying to do exactly what the director is suggesting or requiring, still tend somehow to go too far or not far enough. Because they are human and individual, they cannot be totally programmed or predictable, luckily. They retain their egos and their individualities instead of totally absorbing them into the necessary and intended community of effort and intention.

So that the director has to steer them all carefully through rehearsals, pushing and pulling, cajoling here and encouraging there, knowing exactly when to take hold



SCHNEIDER directs GIELGUD

and when to leave alone. Here is where the skill and tact of the individual director are tested most specifically. For he must at the same time, lead and follow, stimulate and protect, demand from and yet nurture rather than destroy those very imaginations and talents with whom he is in simultaneous rivalry and rapport.

Best of all, the director should be, and sometimes succeeds in becoming, the actor's objective eyes and ears, his trusted onlooker and guide, the authority best suited to lead the others through the uncharted and dangerously difficult bramble-paths of preparation towards some ultimate clearing on the other side. For when that relationship proves possible, the results are inevitably productive—and immediately observable. As well as vice versa.

Throughout this process and ultimately, it is the taste of the director, the sum total of his individual decisions and choices which determine the production's parameters as well as its style and value. The director may be descended from the successors to Stanislavski and want to work everything out from the complex life experiences of the participants themselves. He may be a disciple of the more recent Grotowski exercises in mysticism or tinged with Artaud's flirtation with irrationality; he may want to lace everything with animal sounds or ritual movement—without the nature of the ritual being clearly apparent. He may work spontaneously by instinct or carefully and deliberately via intellect. He may do neither—or both.

He may work with large numbers of people and complex physical groupings and relationships requiring careful and exact staging; he may let all his actors wander about

on the stage to discover their own directions and patterns. He may even be concerned with the internal life of a single individual (or, as in the case of Beckett's latest work, a portion of a single individual form, a head, or even just a solitary stillness. At either extreme, or within the infinite possibilities in the middle, he tries always to translate psychology of whatever shape or form or persuasion into observable behavior that may be clear, interesting and specific—in sum, concerning himself with the revelation of human life on stage.

Sometimes, the director works on a new script, something which has not yet had its identity determined until that moment when it bursts forth for the first time at the premiere; the adventure there is always one of discovery. Sometimes he may find new values or insights or variations of tone in doing a play that is not new but lives only in memory; there are pleasures there for performers and audiences as well. At his highest reach, he may succeed in unveiling a familiar classic and finding within it truths and reverberations previously undiscovered or at least not felt by previous generations. That is when the theatre attains its greatest glory and excitement: in a new and fresh look at a *LEAR*, an *OEDIPUS*, a *GODOT*, a *CHERRY ORCHARD*. And that is when the work of a creative and imaginative director is most clearly distinguished.

So what did I do, after all, with that urn play of Beckett's? I picked the actors, three who though without star names (Diane Wiest, Donald Davis, and Sloane Shelton) could not be bettered anywhere in the American theatre. I decided on the curve and shape and size and texture and location of the urns in question. I worked out the aesthetics and mechanics (fascinating and difficult) of that omnipresent light beam, which in essence became not only the categorical imperative but the seeing eye of the author. Over our three rehearsal weeks, our ten inadequate days of technical rehearsals, as well as a week of invaluable previews, I was able to arrange and rearrange and select and sample and change and change again the symphony of tones and volumes and rhythms and sounds and silences which together determined the particular texture and shape of this particular production of Beckett's *PLAY*. (As well as that of two other plays on the same bill.) That's all.

Just like a director.

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TWO VIEWS

UNEXPECTED GUESTS

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A play by Jordan Crittenden, produced and directed by Charles Grodin; scenery by Stuart Wurtzel; costumes by Joseph G. Aulisi; lighting by Cheryl Thacker. Cast: Constance Forslund, Anne Ives, Robert Earl Jones, Zohra Lampert, Bill Lazarus, Loney Lewis, Frank Piazza, Jerry Stiller, Michael Vale.)

The trouble with *UNEXPECTED GUESTS* is not so much Jordan Crittenden's script as Charles Grodin's production. Granted, the play itself is heavily flawed. But it does possess a zaniness which could, in the right hands, be molded into a performance tour-de-force.

Briefly, the story—which somehow looks hastily edited and cut—is this: Harry Mullin's wife has run away with a cello salesman, leaving him with a cello, dinner, an eagerly "helpful" architect neighbor, a lovelorn peeping Tom, Harry's octogenarian parents, his old scout master, and his son's girl friend. All in all, workable makings for a surrealist black comedy. It even possesses a thoughtful element in the form of Harry's discontented wife.

Unfortunately, at the same time, the play lacks much that is essential to even the most frivolous drama. Necessary motivations and concrete characterizations are only occasionally evident. In addition, the sometimes-funny, sometimes-sophomoric, sometimes-cliche gags lack consistency and development. The result is a series of runaway one-liners.

Given these assets and faults, Mr. Grodin appears to be at a loss as to what to do with them. The cast wanders aimlessly through Stuart Wurtzel's credible living room set, leap-frogging from line to line. They seem to have been given nothing to hold on to, no reason for being, without any definitive pacing, nor clearly structured staging. So, they grab onto superficial qualities and end up being so stilted, obvious and awkward, that you can't tell the good actors from the bad.

Jerry Stiller (Harry), looking ghostly in Joseph Aulisi's ill-chosen pastels, suffers the most; he races through as though he doesn't understand what he's saying or why. The same holds true, to a larger degree, for the bewildered-looking Zohra Lampert as Harry's wife. Only Constance Forslund (the girl friend) has a pleasantly gentle way of trying to make sense out of her inexplicable role.

UNEXPECTED GUESTS needs either brilliant direction to overcome the holes in the writing, or brilliant writing to shine through the baffled direction. It has neither.



by CHARLES GRODIN

(PRODUCER/DIRECTOR
UNEXPECTED GUESTS)

In an interview once, when asked his religion, Woody Allen answered: "Jewish, with an explanation". I had hoped that *UNEXPECTED GUESTS* would be perceived by critics as a show audiences should go to see, "with a qualification". It is essentially what that witty, dashing and uncommonly brilliant critic of the New York Post, Martin Gottfried, said in his review, which saw "immense comic talent" in the playwright. That is a view that is widely held about Jordan Crittenden by many people of high comic accomplishment. It is the very "qualification" that interested me in the play.

Humor of this nature does not reign on Broadway. Bruce Friedman, who for me is as good as they come in this genre, has only been produced once successfully over the years in New York. Even his *STEAMBATH*, which I felt to be a superior play, was chased out of town in a hurry. Years ago there was an Irene Fornes play, *THE OFFICE*, which closed in previews. I believe that is another truly original, remarkable piece of comic writing. The Bruce Friedmans, the Irene Forneses, the Jordan Crittendens, and at least a dozen others of this ilk, are not accepted critically. And therefore as I write this, in a season once again filled with English comedies, we have representing American humor on Broadway a two year old comedy *SAME TIME, NEXT YEAR* and *CALIFORNIA SUITE*, which opened this season. The *STEAMBATHS*, the *OFFICES*, the *UNEXPECTED GUESTS* would not have the following of *SAME TIME, NEXT YEAR* or *CALIFORNIA SUITE*, but I feel they have remarkable talent, that given a chance, would find their audiences.

I for one, and I feel this opinion is shared by thousands of theatre goers, would rather see a flawed piece of original work than a more fully realized less original achievement. Therefore, my hope was for reviews that said "It's funny if you

like etc. etc.", and I and all the other countless admirers of Woody Allen, Monty Python, Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman, Mel Brooks, Saturday Night Live—to name just a few—do like etc. etc. This type of humor can miss at times, but I am very glad it's here for us. If not appreciated, it deserves to be acknowledged.

One might reasonably ask, how could it be acknowledged if it's not appreciated? I believe to have been present at opening night of *UNEXPECTED GUESTS* (and *definitely* not before, incidentally), and not to be aware that the majority of the audience was having a good time, is to suspect that the audience was packed with family, friends and backers. It wasn't. In any case, I've heard forced laughter at openings, and that wasn't it. The audience enjoyed the show. That is, of course, not to suggest that a reviewer should. However, some acknowledgement, I believe, is called for—not curt, cold dismissal of the writer, which was given in half a dozen places.

I remember sitting in a packed theatre watching the film *WHAT'S UP DOC?* The audience was enjoying the picture enormously. I just as strongly was not. I wouldn't therefore assume it wasn't funny. Actually, I'd say I could see where it could be enjoyed, but it was not for me.

It was so ironic that the exact same line of dialogue quoted in the New York Times review of *UNEXPECTED GUESTS* to show how *unfunny* it all was, was the very same line quoted in the New York Post review to show how *funny* it was. How could it be clearer that we are dealing here obviously in opinion, and not facts, which seems often the tone of a notice.

Dick Watts, the retired critic of the New York Post, when asked how he managed to approach each piece of work as though he wanted to like it (and this was reflected even in his many negative notices), answered, "I never assume a writer wrote a play to annoy me." I know many gifted, highly-acclaimed American writers who absolutely will not even consider writing for the theatre because of the improperly in-vogue harshness of critical expression.

With the exception of some rip-off prac-

tioners who exist in all parts of the profession, and don't care what effect they have on anyone as long as they can score for money, none of us are out to annoy—only to do the best we can and hope its enjoyed. And then, given a reasonable amount of critical support, if possible, the audiences will come or not—and if not, then I've never heard it said better or more simply than by Noel Coward: "If the audience doesn't come, the reason is that it wasn't good enough." But, if possible, the audience should be the ultimate judge.

I believe Jordan Crittenden, a writer who holds the high admiration of Norman Lear, Mike Nichols, Elaine May, Buck Henry, Alan Arkin, Carl Reiner—and this particular list could go on and on and on with names of virtually every person of comic accomplishment I have ever met—is unusually gifted, and deserved better acknowledgement and encouragement from the critical community.

I wish I could write with the same feeling about the production itself, because I do not feel that my work came even close to what the playwright had written to be done. I underestimated how difficult it would be. Unwisely, for economic reasons, I chose not to go out of town, and as it was, delayed the opening a week to attempt to present the play in a fairer representation of its worth. The week's delay helped, but I don't feel I succeeded in giving the writer his due.

It is no casual matter that every comedy running on Broadway today has played a not inconsiderable amount of time elsewhere. It seems now a crucial point of production. At one point, as a producer, I considered firing myself as director, because I was unable for various reasons to get what I felt should be happening on stage. However, I quickly changed my mind because I hate to be fired, and so I proceeded to do the best I could. The playwright deserved better, and he will have it. The play is being published by Samuel French, and requests to produce it are coming in from all over the country—and as amazing as it may seem to those who only read the reviews, from foreign countries as well.

Just as in the case of *LOVERS AND OTHER STRANGERS*, which I directed about nine years ago, and which received almost similar over-all notices to *UNEXPECTED GUESTS* (one critic referred to it as Neanderthal Theatre), I believe this play will be done for years to come, and will be enjoyed enormously by American audiences.

I hope the time is not too far off when we can find a place for so many gifted American writers, welcome them back to the theatres, and make them available for their audiences—which are there. Hard as it may be to believe sometimes, months, more often years, of effort go into these works. Writers are very similar to the rest of us. No one enjoys being run over by a bus. I believe more good will is in order.

A PLAYWRIGHT LOOKS AT BLACK THEATRE — 1977

by ED BULLINS

BUBBLING BROWN SUGAR, FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE/WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF, THE WIZ, YOUR ARMS TOO SHORT TO BOX WITH GOD, THE BROWNSVILLE RAID, GODSONG, ON THE LOCK-IN . . . and the list of current New York City Black Theatre productions, on and off-Broadway, is incomplete. And the season is not over, so even more black productions are anticipated.

But not long ago, ten years, in 1967, the thought of Black Theatre productions having a definite foothold on Broadway, in numbers, was unthinkable for most, and was only a faint glint in the eyes of even the most visionary and idealistic members of the Black Arts community. These were the days when serious, profound symposiums were held with titles such as, "Is There Really A Black Theatre?"

And now, not only has Black Theatre become a staple of seasonal Broadway activity, but theatres such as The Negro Ensemble Company, Henry Street Playhouse, The Public Theatre, The American Place, and the numerous Black community theatres in the Greater New York area, have brought Black plays, musicals and shows to off-Broadway, off-off-, institutional, neighborhood and ethnic audiences, in swelling numbers.

And the producers of Black Theatre productions are greatly in evidence—Woodie King, Joseph Papp, Ken Harper, Ashton Springer, Jim Grant and Douglas Turner Ward.

Though with all this present activity, and with so many figures working in this dynamic field, today seems especially vital to the survival and continuation of Black Theatre. For *Black Theatre has reached an identity crisis*, a stagnation in its creative arteries, a directionless drift, and now it is time to ask where is Black Theatre going from here on out. For if this question is not addressed, and very soon, Black Theatre may already be a cultural artifact, boringly imitating the successful theatrical styles, content and spirit of a bygone era.

The present great surge of Black Theatre activity was inspired by the socio-political activism of the Sixties. It was a time of new self-awareness and identity for blacks, and theatre was a symptom, symbol and response of that urge for social/political change, and it served as a vehicle for this noted social upheaval. Much of the New Black Theatre took on an adversary socio-political-cultural stance, for it gave voice to many elements of the black culture that had previously been denied, ignored and

thought voiceless by the dominant American mainstream white American culture and theatre.

Today, many of the social, political and economic goals of the upward mobile blacks, if not fully met, have at least seen strong promise. The times are cool, even in the heart of the black ghettos, which spread from East Hampton, Long Island to West Oakland, Calif. This stillness among the body politic of black people, combined with the black leadership vacuum, has left many black artists with less socially profound messages to rap than they had in the previous decade. Subsequently, there is a flatness, a predictability and blandness in the work of the present emerging black playwrights.

Except for Ntozake Shange's new work, black plays mostly seem as boring and tame as most average white plays. This mediocrity is caused by a psychological transition that intellectual/artistic blacks, the playwrights in question, are going through. If it is no longer trendy to be an adversary of American society, then where does that leave a young black creator? To swallow the American Dream as if one ate the whole thing? To become a reformer of some kind, an advocate of social, welfare, prison, consumer, environmental or political reforms, while waiting for the economy to turn juicy again (poverty program), so that one can finally cop that forty acres and the mule that got away? Or should the black playwright turn inward and repeat the ghetto literary practices of kitchen melodramas, black bourgeoisie problem plays, lyric ballads of street and prison experience, or imitate the stale romance of the sensitive black artists seeking a place in the American white dominated sun?

So there must be something else a black dramatist can do. And the playwright, being at bottom an artist, will surely discover what this something else is. And the times will provide limited assistance. But the wait for this new wave of black consciousness and creativity is so terribly dull, so paralyzing of the mind and spirit—in fact, it is trite and ordinary. Maybe it's a crisis of the spirit and psyche that black artists need to address themselves to, to offset this routine deadening ennui which is determined by materialism, a non-adventuresome audience, and a faint suspicion that things have drifted into a quagmire of self-doubt and loss of purpose.

Then it is toward the future that the new black dramatist is reaching, for now, it is "No Place To Be Somebody".

ED BULLINS' latest play, *DADDY*, will be presented by Woodie King's New Federal Theatre, as a joint production with Joseph Papp and The New York Shakespeare Festival. Mr. Bullins is on the staff of The New York Shakespeare Festival, where he coordinates a playwrights' workshop.

**EXCLUSIVE
REPORT FROM**

SAN FRANCISCO

by STANLEY EICHELBAUM

(Drama Critic, *San Francisco Examiner*)

There's been a volcanic eruption of theatrical activity in the San Francisco Bay Area over the last couple of years. Troupes have sprung up like mushrooms (a total of 87 by one count), and though their work is erratic, mostly low-grade and often punishing, it's a healthy situation that has attracted droves of young people, who are surely better off on the stage than on the street.

But if professionalism is in very short supply, audiences exist for just about everything. Judging from their enthusiasm, they're not bothered by ragged and inferior work, especially in the experimental hotbed of Berkeley, where a great deal of the activity is concentrated. Theater groups have settled into converted warehouses, churches, shops, even an old bus. Their interests vary, from the exemplary semi-professional Berkeley Repertory Theater, which is modern classic-oriented, to the deadly earnest Epic West, a center for the study of Bertolt Brecht, to something called the Rags & Patches Theatrical of the Apres-Garde, which does absurdist mime pieces.

Several Bay Area troupes function as acting schools. Nearly all hotly pursue foundation and government money (a possible reason for the existence of so many). And most are big on improvisation, a favorite route for the amateur workshops and theater co-operatives, which will try anything, even a psychodrama version of *KING LEAR*, with a woman cast in the title role. We've also had an all-female *WAITING FOR GODOT* and, with San Francisco being a gay mecca, innumerable all-male productions, including *MAME* and *GEORGE WASHINGTON SLEPT HERE*.

While all this is admittedly different, none of it is really new, and the few serious companies working with new playwrights,



Reinhardt/Walker/KNOCK KNOCK

like the conscientious Magic Theater and Berkeley Stage Company, have turned up nothing very vital or significant lately to help the anemic American theater.

Good new plays are hard to come by, and no company has been more badly burned by "world premieres" than William Ball's eminent American Conservatory Theater. It's our biggest and best (21,300 subscriptions, 200 in personnel and an annual budget of \$4½ million), with a repertory of classics and modern works done at the 1,600-seat Geary Theater in downtown San Francisco.

But their efforts with new plays have been grimly unsuccessful, notably last season, when they chose to introduce two works for the Bicentennial, one by Michael McClure, author of *THE BEARD*, and the other by Tennessee Williams.

McClure's play, *GENERAL GORGEOUS*, was a silly, cloddish pop-art comedy about a comic-strip hero in the vein of Captain Marvel. It was an inglorious failure.

Williams' new work, *THIS IS (AN ENTERTAINMENT)*, did at least generate some excitement, since the illustrious playwright was in residence, pinning his hope

on ACT, where he could go about the business of polishing what he called a "rough draft" far from the pressures of Broadway. However, the experience was a bitter one, both for Williams and ACT. The play was a skittish, incoherent tragi-comedy, raunchily delving into the sex life of yet another nymphomaniacal Williams heroine. Nobody much cared for the play, and Williams was unable to whip it into shape.

Soon after that, the playwright returned here (he spent several months in San Francisco last year, cutting quite a figure in all the swinging circles) to supervise a production in a tiny (99-seat) theater of his revised script for *OUT CRY*. An adventurous producer, Lyle Leverich, took a chance on Williams' new version of his 1973 Broad-



Boyette/Ward/Williams

way flop, which he retitled *A TWO-CHARACTER PLAY*. It proved to be a gripping, if slender, piece and had quite a successful run.

Meantime, ACT is proceeding with caution. For the current season, they withdrew to the relative safety of Jules Feiffer's *KNOCK KNOCK* and Tom Stoppard's *TRAVESTIES* (in repertory with *OTHELLO* and *MAN AND SUPER-MAN*). They did, however, schedule the American premiere of a contemporary Soviet play, *VALENTIN AND VALENTINA*, a Moscow hit, which they discovered during a Russian tour last spring. At this writing, it hasn't yet opened. But everyone's hoping for the best.

THEATRE BOOK ROUND-UP / OLD AND NEW

FAMOUS ACTORS AND ACTRESS ON THE AMERICAN STAGE, by William C. Young, is aptly subtitled "Documents of American Theater History". This overwhelming two-volume biographical reference work delves fascinatingly into the lives, the work, and the acting philosophies of 225 performers who have appeared on American stages since 1752. But this is far more than a reference work—it provides a most readable insight into the actor's approaches to specific roles, as well as their varied approaches to acting in general. Contemporary sources provide the

substantive material, including a photo or drawing, culled from reviews, interviews, and articles written during the period of each biographee. (R.R. Bowker Co.; 2 vols., 1298 pages; \$55 per set.)

Taking us from the playwright-priests of ancient times to our own poetic-realist playwrights of mid-century America, John Gassner's *MASTERS OF THE DRAMA* covers a vast history of world drama. In a compact volume, this comprehensive work tries to tell you everything you need to know about world theatre—through 1950. More for reference than reading.

(Dover Pubs.; 890 pages; \$10.)

Round-table discussions usually probe deeply into their subjects, and the only fault that I can find in this illuminating book, *THEATRES, SPACES, ENVIRONMENTS: EIGHTEEN PROJECTS*, by Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo and Richard Schechner, is the lack of an antagonist to spark another point of reference. These round-table conversations cover eighteen environmental theatre projects of various types, all eruditely and fully examined by the people responsible for them. An insightful trip into space.

(Drama Book Specialists; 181 pages; \$22.50.)

—Ira J. Bilowit

EXCLUSIVE REPORT FROM WASHINGTON, D.C.

by RICHARD L. COE
(Drama Critic, *The Washington Post*)

With theater everywhere striving to discover where present flux will lead, Washington's stages do share one common concern: the need for new plays and playwrights.

Unquestionably, the Kennedy Center remains the capital's glittering beacon, its crowds and attention undiminished into its sixth season though music and dance have the edge over its plays and musicals. Its procession of British plays and American revivals will be brightened this spring with Arthur Miller's new *THE ARCHBISHOP'S CEILING*. Ahead are two promising, creative ventures, the Stuart Ostrow-Roger Stevens Musical Theatre Lab, which will be testing new works this spring before free audiences in a rooftop room, and a new auditorium, also on the terrace level, created by a Bicentennial gift from Japan, still a year away. It needs reiterating that the center has no federal money for productions. Private angels and commercial managements are its sole source of supply, though the attractions are tax-exempt.

Just as unquestionably, the city's most reliable standards are those of Arena Stage's three performing areas. It's taken 27 seasons and a maze of financial gifts to achieve Arena's present enviable standards. On its major stage Arena followed a firm SAINT JOAN with a New York failure, SATURDAY, SUNDAY, MONDAY, which came off pleasurably, yielding to THE AUTUMN GARDEN. Christopher Hampton's A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN FILM, having its first productions at four regional theaters, opens in May. The gemlike Kreeger, Arena's 500-seat proscenium, began its season with "Three by Beckett," two American premieres of fascination (THAT TIME and FOOTFALLS plus PLAY) staged by Alan Schneider. The Kreeger achieved superlative ensemble playing for David Rabe's STREAMERS (not the Mike Nichols Lincoln Center version but a new staging by David Chambers) and soon will open CATSPLAY, an American premiere for Istvan Orkeny's Czech success.

In its Old Vat Room, Arena's series of "plays-in-the-process" have stimulated audience discussions with writers, directors and players. Quite rightly, these are not reviewed in the media. Selling tickets is not the purpose, though they sell anyway. The point is for playwrights to feel audience reactions and learn from them.

Housed in the Elizabethan theater of the

Folger Shakespeare Library, the Folger Theater Group does not neglect its patron saint but under Louis Scheeder it comes, understandably, more to life with new scripts. Modern players go adrift in speaking words and verse well. In flat or vivid contemporary prose they are more at ease. Jack Gilhooley's MUMMER'S END, an amusing parable about a Philadelphia family's threatened tradition with the city's New Year's Day parade is ending its run. Coming up March 22 for a month is Christopher Sergel's BLACK ELK SPEAKS, another new work drawn from 19th century Indian lore. Folger's standards continue to rise, thanks to increasingly professional casts and impressively garnered grants. How does the Folger manage Equity casts before only 210 seats?

Of the "experimental" companies dotting the local landscape, Harry Bagdikian's New Playwrights Theater has the decided novelty of quality in its questing. Started five years ago with but 25 seats, NPT has found a home in an old midtown gym. It presents only new works but in doing so has also uncovered capable non-professional actors, directors and technicians as well as rafts of ambitious scripts from all over. Joseph Papp took a look at HAGAR'S CHILDREN, by Ernest Joselovitz, and decided to move it, director Robert Graham Small and his cast to Astor Place. Bagdikian and artistic director Paul Hildebrand, Jr., are making a dream happen but they're too wise to rush anything.

At the National—its 142-year-site's fifth building—booked through Kennedy Center (only its chief, Roger Stevens, would take the risk) Simon Gray's OTHERWISE ENGAGED had the same welcome for Tom Courtenay and Harold Pinter's fine cast it later received in New York. Tom Stoppard this year outranks both Shaw and Shakespeare. His DIRTY LINEN opened happily in the scruffy West End Theater (nee Washington Theater Club) but was uncomfortable in its holdover Eisenhower run at Kennedy Center. TRAVESTIES kept Stoppard at the Ike and John Wood led it to sold out trade New York never quite mustered for this brilliant charade. Those who needed it explained would not, of course, have grasped the explanations.

Barring new plays, stars have taken to solo portraits as national celebrities. Hal Holbrook's habit of dropping unfamiliar material into his Mark Twain packed the Opera House for a week and no one could get enough of Julie Harris's Emily Dickinson and THE BELLE OF AMHERST. at

the Eisenhower. James Whitmore came to the National to start a long tour, avoiding New York, as Teddy Roosevelt in BULLY. Eugenia Rawls flourished with three solo works in the Kennedy Center's rooftop Chautauqua Tent, as Tallulah Bankhead, Fanny Kemble and 20-odd Women of the West. Emlyn Williams was Dylan Thomas at the Kreeger. Ford's found Eileen Heckart as Eleanor Roosevelt and Billy Dee Williams as Martin Luther King, Jr., not quite a one-man show for Coretta was visible.

As elsewhere the new musicals have been disastrous. THE BAKER'S WIFE should have been left to Raimu on film. HELLZAPOPPIN' and Jerry Lewis never did meet. The light-hearted, charming MUSIC IS of George Abbott, Will Holt and Richard Adler would be playing somewhere yet if only its ambitions had avoided New York, a climate too cruel for so frivolous a bloom.

No report on today's theater can neglect what's happening on the chow-show circuit. Dinner theaters flourish here, too, attracting audiences for their first view of round actors. In most, the amateur standards are as haphazard as the food, earnest, home cooking on both levels. But three are above the crowd.

Frank Matthews' Hayloft Dinner Theater, an Equity house at Manassas, Va., features his chef quite wisely with his plays, but he has had winsome Stubby Kaye and Pat Karpen, a versatile, winning actress who merits wide attention.

The first of the local lot was Burn Brae, Burtonsville, Md., which has poured its earnings back into an increasingly attractive, now 350-seat room. It chose 1776 for the Bicentennial and kept it running a record-setting 19 months and now with a capable cast for THE SOUND OF MUSIC, who knows?

Most sparkling of the trio is Harlequin Dinner Theater, Gaithersburg, Md., whose youthful college grads have zest, imagination, pleasing voices and infectious elan in such pieces as THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE, ONCE UPON A MATTRESS and THE APPLE TREE. Their skills have Equity regulations baffled. How is it that these non-pros are superior to some Equity visitors?

Harlequin's founders, Nicholas Howay and Kary Walker, have stretched to more splendid quarters for a second Harlequin in Atlanta, Ga., a capital that's very fashionable right now in this one. They say they're looking for a brand new musical. Maybe the Kennedy Center's new Musical Lab will turn up one for them.

**EXCLUSIVE
REPORT FROM**

CLEVELAND

by BILL DOLL

(Drama Critic, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*)

About ten years ago, the Cleveland Play House, then in its 51st season, mailed notes to its subscribers warning them that one of its productions, *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF*, might be offensive.

While the day of the note has passed, in those two acts—a professional resident company well into its second half-century of continuous production despite an audience who would seem of somewhat fragile tastes—lies the paradox of Cleveland theater.

On the surface, this old industrial city suspended between east and midwest would not seem to be the most hospitable corner of America for the theater arts. After all, what one tends to hear about Cleveland is that its river burns and travelling salesmen in movies often live there.

But the theater tradition is strong, surprisingly diversified, and rooted in generations of old money, and in a belief in the social importance of the dramatic arts.

At the Play House, those roots have meant security. With a new artistic director (Richard Oberlin, who took over in 1971) and the fresh breezes blowing in from the burgeoning regional theater movement, security no longer is an impediment to growth.

The grande dame of resident theaters is beginning to grow younger.

The change isn't always as clear from the plays performed. A regional's mandate is to preserve the best in theater tradition. Thus, this year has brought *MAN AND SUPERMAN*, *A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN*, and *MACBETH*. But there has also been a 1903 play, *THE YELLOW JACKET*, and a spiffy, very new revival of Kern and Harbach's *THE CAT AND THE FIDDLE*, conceived and directed by Jack Lee and staged by Eddie Gasnar.

The new play this season was Kevin O'Morrison's *LADYHOUSE BLUES*, a tender, lovely mood piece about a mother and her daughters in St. Louis during World War I. But beneath the mood, alas, there didn't seem to be a drama.

The surest signs of change are the new directors, actors, and designers called in.

The set designs especially—like Stuart Wurtzel's massive, clammy fortress walls for *MACBETH*—have striped years from the theater.

Back when the Play House was young and crusading, Karamu, a neighborhood house and non-professional theater, was using drama to integrate immigrants into America. The immigrants are now blacks, the plays explorations of their problems (*SIZWE BANZI IS DEAD*, *SHORT EYES*), but the ends are the same.

Dobama, squirreled in a basement, and the almost full-time avocation of Don and Marilyn Bianchi, attracts the audience looking for new works, or those never produced before in Cleveland. They have just finished Albee's *SEASCAPE*, and a locally written musical, *THE CROONER*, by Scott Martin.

The Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival—which is more festival than Shakespeare—has been swooped up by Vincent Dowling, as its new artistic director. Dowling, from the Abbey Players, via the Missouri Rep., has given that summer theater's productions (such as *AH, WILDERNESS*, *ROMEO AND JULIET*, and *DEAR LIAR*) the kind of excitement that we were always told theater was supposed to give it.

Then there is the Hanna, the Broadway road show house, fallen on dry days. More so than any other local theater, its fate is determined in New York by the number of road companies sent out. Fifteen years ago, the Hanna's season numbered 16 shows; last year there were eight; this year, maybe nine (among them *ROYAL FAMILY*, *BUBBLING BROWN SUGAR*, *EQUUS* and *BELLE OF AMHERST*).

In short, there is theater in Cleveland and people who truly love it. In fact, one enterprising young man, Tom Fulton, is about to launch another professional repertory company, "Centerep". For Cleveland, there will be no more warning notes.

But there will be diversity, often quality, and at times the kind of evening against which movies and television cannot begin to compete.

**EXCLUSIVE
REPORT FROM**

by BARBARA THOMAS

(Amusements Editor, *The Atlanta Journal*)

Atlanta's theater season is in full flower, however the faithful may find the productions offered generally longer in quantity than in quality.

The Peachtree Playhouse, haven for winter stock here, opened with an unimpressive production of *NORMAN CONQUESTS*, starring Eileen Heckart, a grand dame of realism cast in a tea and crumpet farce. It was enough to make an insomniac doze off.

The theater, however, came back to life two weeks later with an almost perfect production of a new play, *AN ALMOST PERFECT PERSON*, starring Colleen Dewhurst and Richard Schaal. Schaal said the production, directed by Zoe Caldwell, is being tailored for a hopeful move to Broadway later this year.

Eva Marie Saint and husband Jeffrey Hayden brought in a well-performed, finely-directed version of an unexciting play, George Kelly's *A FATAL WEAKNESS*, staged as a '20s drawing room comedy.

About this time last year, Cloris Leachman and Schaal brought in *SAME TIME NEXT YEAR*. Loretta Swit and Don Murray have brought it in again on the winter stock circuit to generally good reception.

Playwright Ed Graczyk's new play, *COME BACK TO THE 5 AND DIME*, JIMMY DEAN, JIMMY DEAN, premiered at Atlanta's professional house, the Alliance theater. (This was the group that gave Preston Jones' *LAST MEETING OF THE KNIGHTS OF THE WHITE MAGNOLIA*, part of his *TEXAS TRILOGY*, its first viewing last year.) Fannie Flagg stars in the play about a group of Jimmy Dean disciples who have returned to a worn-out dimestore for a reunion.

The Alliance, the city's only resident theater, which is housed in the Memorial Arts Center, got off to a bad start this season with a sadly inadequate production of *SCAPINO*, followed by an equally unsatisfactory version of Ibsen's *HEDDA*.

ATLANTA

Academy Theater, the city's voice for the avant garde, directed by Frank Wittow, has a reputation for dazzling those who take their theater seriously. The season opener, *WAITING FOR GODOT*, proved no disappointment. The group, nationally known for its efforts in experimental theater, is now in its run of Athol Fugard's *THE BLOOD KNOT*.

On the dinner theater circuit, John Caradine dropped out of his role as Big Daddy in *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF* after one performance, crediting poor health as the reason. Mercedes McCambridge saved the effort with a delightful characterization of Big Mama. . . . Van Johnson is currently drawing big houses for the comedy, *SEND ME NO FLOWERS*, at the Mid-night Sun Dinner Theater.

James Daly, of tv's "Medical Center," is at The Peachtree Playhouse for a two-week run of *EQUUS*.

Theater critics here have formed an association to set up a positive dialogue of dramatic criticism and to increase the level of professionalism in local theater criticism.

The Atlanta Circle of Drama Critics is comprised of five fulltime theater reviewers who are dedicated to "recognizing superior achievement in theater through annual awards . . . and to bring about an increased public awareness of the importance to theater in Atlanta—specifically locally produced and created drama."

Current officers are: Barbara Thomas, amusements editor for the *Atlantic Journal*, President; Stuart Culpepper, columnist and critic for the *Atlanta Gazette*, vice president; and Mercy Sandberg-Wright is secretary-treasurer. Other members of the board of directors are Helen Smith, the *Atlanta Constitution*, and Steve Warren, *WGKA Radio* and *Creative Loafing*.

The group plans its first awards dinner the first Monday in June, with honors given to both locally produced and touring productions.

EXCLUSIVE REPORT FROM

PHILADELPHIA

by ERNEST SCHIER

(Drama Critic, *The Philadelphia Bulletin*)

The Philadelphia Drama Guild began its four-play season with a haunting production of *HEARTBREAK HOUSE*. The effort may have sapped the creative energies of artistic director Douglas Seale because thereupon the Drama Guild offered indifferent treatment of Peter Shaffer's *FIVE FINGER EXERCISE* and *ENTER A FREE MAN*, the least of Tom Stoppard's plays. There is no American play in the Drama Guild's season, a matter of some embarrassment to Seale and company. That company is an excellent one. Drawing on his Canadian experience, Seale has used Tony Van Bridge, Dominic Blythe and Betty Leighton this season. But perhaps the chief adornment of the company has been Louise Troy, always a skillful actress who is maturing into a fine one with her sense of timing intact.

The Drama Guild will close out the 1976-77 season with its production of *HAMLET*. John Glover will have the title role. One of the obvious problems the resident theater has had to face this season is that the bulk of the work has fallen on Seale's shoulders in a way that was not planned. He is personally responsible for three of the four plays, although he got little comfort from Douglas Campbell's assistance when Campbell directed *ENTER A FREE MAN*. The Drama Guild is planning on expanding to a five, or even a six, play subscription season next year.

Contributions from Broadway have been ungratefully received. Douglas Campbell's bombastic style reduced *EQUUS* to the level of case history. Floundering pre-Broadway productions included Claire Bloom in *THE INNOCENTS*, largely undirected by Harold Pinter; an inept comedy by Ben Travers, *THE BED BEFORE YESTERDAY*, that left Carol Channing as bored as the audience; Shirley Knight dripping honeysuckle in *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*—one of this very good actress' misadventures; and a psychological

blur titled *THE DREAM*, which died aborning with a cast that included Lee Richardson and Barbara Baxley.

Michael Kahn is not having his usual success with actresses this year. In addition to *STREETCAR*, several other plays were imported to the University of Pennsylvania's Zellerbach Theater from Kahn's Princeton stronghold, the McCarter Theater. *MAJOR BARBARA* (this seems to be a Shaw season) exposed Maria Tucci as Barbara Undershaft in a performance that was cool and remote. Happier occasions took place with Julie Harris as *THE BELLE OF AMHERST*, Betty Comden and Adolph Green warming up their act for New York, and the arrival of the Abbey Theater in its earthy performance of *THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS*.

There are problems in theater here that we will get to another time, but one interesting phenomenon is the explosion of local groups who have dedicated themselves to new dramatists. The most interesting of these is The Philadelphia Company, formed by Robert Hedley, formerly chairman of the theater department of Villanova University. This is Philadelphia Company's second season, occupying now a theater-cum-auditorium on Broad Street, a few doors from the Shubert.

Hedley opened the season with *THE LION AND THE LAMB*, a version of Bert Lahr's life by Joseph Orzdi, that had more than its share of the faults that many younger playwrights seem able to embrace. This was followed by a muddled production, drowned in plastic tubing, titled *FUTURE TENSE*, a long and awesomely confused spacetravel by John Sevcik, directed by Irene Baird. Hedley plans to keep the emphasis on new plays while mixing in adaptations, translations and something of Shakespeare.

Thus far this has been a bleak season with barely a few bright moments, as noted above. It could be a very long spring in this City of Brotherly Love.

EXCLUSIVE REPORT FROM

DENVER

by BARBARA MACKAY

(Drama Critic, *The Denver Post*)

Being a drama critic in Denver may sound like a contradiction in terms. Even Denverites get solicitous when I mention my profession. I'm often asked what I do with all my spare time.

In fact, Denver's not a "theatre town" yet. There is no central theatre district and Denver is very much a city dedicated to sports, professional and recreational. Its priorities are clear. There's a ten percent seat tax in the major professional theatre; the money goes to finance the city's mammoth new sports arena.

But though most Denver residents don't know the names of the best small theatres in town, there is a steadily increasing interest in theatre and, compared to five years ago, a tremendous amount of activity—most of it unremunerated. Most curious of all, although Denver doesn't have a strong theatre-going public, the audiences that do exist are incredibly faithful. Each small theatre seems to have its own loyal following; and people who live outside Denver travel for hours to patronize their favorite companies.

There are two fully professional year-round theatres in Denver. The Country Dinner Playhouse (the only locally based Equity house) produces slick, easy to digest after-dinner fare. The Auditorium Theatre imports road shows, most recently JOHN BROWN'S BODY, FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, EQUUS, and BUBBLING BROWN SUGAR, and in July it will present the premier of Liza Minelli's new musical, directed by Martin Scorsese.

The other theatres are loosely tagged community, alternative or developmental, all of them non-Equity. Some pay a little, some pay nothing. One pays its producer and technical crews, but not its actors. One theatre, The Changing Scene, gets funding as a developmental theatre because it does only new plays (recently it premiered Israel Horowitz's *THE QUANNAPOWITT QUARTET*) and has several times gotten money as the residence for Rockefeller grant recipients.

The Germinal Stage Denver, the most consistent and versatile small theatre in the Denver area (it seats 99), has become a self-supporting operation in two years. Located in a converted warehouse in the commercial downtown area, the Germinal does everything from Pinter's *HOME COMING* to Handke's *OFFENDING THE AUDIENCE* to light musicals. And it does them well.

One reason the Germinal Stage is successful is that it doesn't function as a community theatre in the usual sense: an outlet for people who want to try acting. The

Germinal employs a core of well-trained actors, who double as stage-managers, directors and technicians, and it supplements this group with people from Colorado's huge stock of unemployed non-Equity actors.

The Gaslight Theatre, located in the basement of a house on the outskirts of Denver, is another small theatre dedicated to doing plays which, by Denver's standards are tough and hard-edged: *THAT CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON*, *LAMPPOST REUNION*, *SLOW DANCE ON THE KILLING GROUND*. And the Theatre Under Glass, a pocket theatre downtown, does work of varying quality, mainly proven scripts: *THE INVESTIGATION*, *LUV*, *A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC*.

There's a new dinner theatre, specializing in musicals, and two new theatrical "centers," which plan to present a variety of things: vaudeville acts, music, poetry readings, mime.

Theatre Lab West, established by a couple who worked with Andre Gregory back East, is trying to establish a taste for experimental theatre in Denver. Formally labelled an "alternative" group, the Lab works without scripts and has recently imported New York's environmental designer Jerry Rojo and two members of the Mabou Mines, who held acting workshops for members of the Theatre Lab West.

One theatre in Denver stands out from all these smaller ones: the Bonfils, a large (550 seat) house with a proscenium stage, wall-to-wall carpeting and Denver's first in-theatre bar. But in terms of actors' pay-scale, non-Equity status and open auditions, the Bonfils is still a community theatre, geared to provide Denver's middle-aged audiences with fairly reliable, unstartling shows. The most off-beat production this season was a fine *CANDIDE*, followed directly by a leaden *AUNTIE MAME*.

Ironically, despite its rather conservative image, the well-endowed Bonfils provides the most socially oriented, politically concerned theatre in Denver, when it imports groups like the Teatro Campesino and Black Arts West for its summer festival. The Bonfils has also just opened Denver's only cabaret theatre, an intimate space which promises to fill a large gap in Denver's theatrical set-up.

Since Colorado is very involved with its own heritage, there are plenty of melodrama theatres throughout the state, and twice as many during the summer. Some are straight, some spoofs. The best is Denver's Heritage Square, which uses melodrama as an excuse for first-class improvisational comedy.

There's plenty more in Denver: some erratic black and Chicano theatres, several

excellent college groups and a number of children's theatres. And then there's the rest of Colorado. Boulder is particularly interesting, with at least 2 serious drama groups, a medium to good dinner theatre, a feminist collective, and the University of Colorado, whose summer Shakespeare Festival productions of *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* and *A COMEDY OF ERRORS*, and a sensational *KING JOHN*.

Colorado Springs has a good repertory company, The Troupe, but the best work often turns up in even smaller communities. Steamboat Springs, otherwise noted as a skiing resort, has a summer festival which last year produced an excellent version of Neil Simon's *THE GOOD DOCTOR*.

Creede, an old mining town in the southwest part of Colorado, still only has one main street, but that street boasts an old theatre and a fine rep company made up of young actors from all over the state.

One of the most interesting—and certainly the most controversial—aspects of theatre in Colorado is the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, a multimillion dollar complex which is in the process of being built in downtown Denver. It will include a variety of different theatres and rehearsal spaces and will provide Denver with a centralized theatre area and a professional company.

Whether or not Denver wants or needs a center for the performing arts, whether it will drain energy from the smaller groups or will inspire still more theatre activity are all hot topics in Denver these days. One real possibility is that a large percentage of Denver's population will continue hang-gliding and skiing on weekends anyway, even if the finest repertory company in the country emerges here, and that another large suburban chunk will continue being entertained by mediocre community productions of *THE UNSINKABLE MOLLY BROWN* and won't make the effort to support the D.C.P.A.

In any case, Denver is becoming increasingly interesting as a touchstone for American taste. Despite the recent eruption of skyscrapers and disco joints, Denver is not a cosmopolitan city. It still caters to cowboys and pseudo-cowboys. So what happens to Denver's Center for the Performing Arts will be really revelatory, suggesting more about contemporary American cultural attitudes than did the construction of Washington's Kennedy Center or New York's Lincoln Center. If the Center for the Performing Arts works in Denver, it will mean that a goodly number of Americans are willing to let themselves be entertained and/or energized by something other than hockey pucks, moguls and Mary Hartman.

EXCLUSIVE REPORT FROM

DETROIT

by JAY CARR

(Drama Critic, *The Detroit News*)

You can always tell when it's spring in Detroit: the cars turn green. Spring, with its promise of renewal, is awaited with particular eagerness here this year, for the first two months of 1977 have turned up little that can be thought of as remarkable. And almost nothing new or innovative.

Detroit's large Fisher Theatre used to be a regular stop for Broadway-bound musicals. But with the drying up of the Broadway musical theatre, the Fisher seldom houses tryouts these days. A season framed on the one hand by the Zero Mostel FIDLER and on the other by the incoming A CHORUS LINE may be most memorable for Douglas Campbell's portrayal of the tormented psychiatrist in EQUUS. The more one sees the play, the more the focus shifts from the troubled stableboy who blinded six horses to the doctor appointed by the court to cure him. The doctor envies the boy the primitive purity of his self-made religion centered around horses, and howls in interior anguish at the barren rationality of his own existence. Campbell, who knows how to play his voice like a cello, makes the doctor's anguish palpable, and Keith McDermott was touchingly vulnerable as his patient.

The Meadow Brook Theatre, on the Oakland University campus, some 40 miles from downtown Detroit, is this area's professional resident theatre. It is run by an accomplished veteran, Terence Kilburn, whose productions are invariably intelligent and usually proficient. But Meadow Brook gives its essentially white suburban audience play-it-safe theater. Mark Medoff's WHEN YOU COMIN' BACK, RED RYDER? is, by Meadow Brook standards, violently controversial. Last month's production of SLEUTH was mediocre, and the current offering, Shakespeare's MERCHANT OF VENICE, had the misfortune to lose an actor who twisted his knee on the night before the opening. This meant that Kilburn, reading from the book, had to step into the secondary role of Gratiano. Kilburn has had the training. He can render the music and poetry in Shakespeare. The others in the cast sounded, as young American actors so often do in Shakespeare, flat, although the experienced Booth Colman tried valiantly to work around stereotype as Shylock. Still, the production underlined the glum irony of Oakland closing down its acting academy when the need to train actors to speak Shakespearean English has never seemed greater.

The repertoire in the dinner theaters has been negligible, but the Attic Theatre in the ethnic enclave known as Greektown is a welcome new entry. Graduating from one-acters and skits, the Attic presented its first full-length offering, Paul Zindel's tender memory play, THE EFFECT OF GAMMA RAYS ON MAN-IN-THE-MOON MARIGOLDS, in which Patricia Albrecht was a singularly affecting Tillie, banking on mutation as a beacon of hope, and Divina Cook was both harrowing and affecting as her slovenly gorgon of a mother.

The most consistent of Detroit's university theatres has been The Theatre on the Marygrove College campus, which acts as a performing arts consortium with the Jesuit-run University of Detroit. To a lineup consisting of HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES, U.S.A., A CRY OF PLAYERS and A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE will soon be added a new musical version of TAMING OF THE SHREW. Wayne State University will add MOBY DICK REHEARSED (the Orson Welles adaptation) to its repertoire, the most notable entry of which so far is an OTHELLO, with Walter Mason and Michel Cullen a more than usually powerful Othello-Iago tandem.

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—Clive Barnes, N. Y. Times

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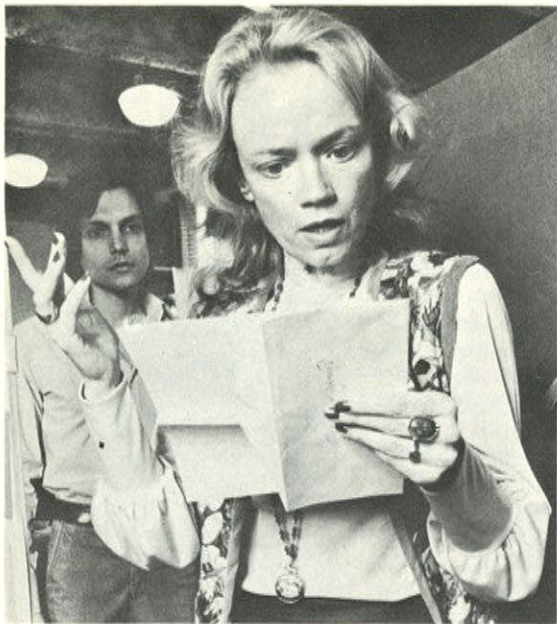
PHOTO ESSAY / PREVIEW

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' VIEUX CARRE

VIEUX CARRE is a play within a play, a remembrance of some of Tennessee Williams' early experiences as a writer in New Orleans. In the guise of The Writer, we see him discovering himself as an artist and as an individual.

The tenants in a rooming house are the structure of the story, which tells how their lives—and influences—crossed at one period in time. The main characters are: The Writer (Richard Alfieri); the landlady, Mrs. Wire (Sylvia Sidney); The Painter (Tom Aldredge); Jane (Diane Kagan); Tye (Tom Reilly); Mrs. Wayne (Olive Deering); Miss Carrie (Iris Whitney); Nursie (Gertrude Jeanette); Ferguson (Tom McDermott).

- 1) (Ferguson/Jane) The director and the actress in the "First Frame"—the prologue. *"You know, Miss, I lighted shows for David Belasco . . ."*
- 2) (Mrs. Wire/Nursie) The landlady now sleeps on a mattress in the hallway to police her boarders' comings and goings. She answers her housekeeper's complaint: *"Nursie, you know there ain't no bats in the Quarter."*
- 3) (Writer/Painter) The aging alcoholic painter, consumptive, begins his compassionate seduction of the writer. *"I know the sound the loneliness . . . a single man needs visitors at night. Necessary as bread, as blood in the body."*
- 4) (Mrs. Wire/Mrs. Wayne) Mrs. Wire teases Mrs. Wayne about her son's support checks, which never arrive. Mrs. Wayne: *"He said, 'Dear Mother, soon's I'm out of the guardhouse I will send you my army paycheck.' That was the message."*
- 5) (Writer/Mrs. Wire) The landlady offers the writer a chance to work for her to pay for his room and board. *"You claim to write, ignorant as you are!"*
- 6) (Writer/Jane) The writer brings a letter to Jane, which is a medical report on her condition. It's obviously bad news, which she says is about a relative. He asks, *"Is this relative close?"* *"In a way. Quite close, although it's been half a year since I've really recognized her—"*
- 7) (Miss Carrie/Mrs. Wayne) The police are about to arrive late at night after Mrs. Wire has poured boiling water into the apartment of her "society" photographer tenant below, and the action is hectic. *"Now dear, you must stay calm—remember your angina."*
- 8) (Painter/Jane/Writer) Mrs. Wire wants everyone to say that the Painter drunkenly knocked the kettles of boiling water from the stove. *"She wishes you all to corroborate her lie!"*



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9) (Tenants/Photographer/Mrs. Wire) The witnesses surround Mrs. Wire as the photographer accuses her. *"This is the notorious Mrs. Wire."*

10) (Mrs. Wire/Painter) Tired of the painter's complaints, Mrs. Wire decides to evict him. *"Git on outta here. Cough up your lungs in the gutter."*

11) (Tye/Jane) Facing imminent hospitalization, Jane decides it's time for her to find a rich man who can afford to take care of her in her waning days. *"The bed bit is finished between us."*



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All photos by Gerry Goodstein

SPOTLIGHT on Someone Worth Watching

JOE ABALDO



Joe Abaldo is now starring in a Broadway show, but unless you've seen *THE MAGIC SHOW* recently, you would probably not readily recognize his name. Yet, if his past experience is any indication, Joe will float into theatrical prominence quite naturally.

"Getting to where I am now," says Joe, "was a series of flukes that seem to have led me here."

I first saw Joe performing at the New Repertory Company, a non-Equity off-off-Broadway theatre, where he was one of the co-founders. At that time in his life, Joe was in doubt about his acting potential and was considering returning to backstage work, as business manager. And only some well-earned critical notices made him decide to stay with acting.

As it turned out, this decision was a wise one, for the group's next show, *IONESCOPADE*, was a smashing success. Kermit Bloomgarden saw it and offered to produce it off-Broadway, where Joe took the central role of the mime.

This new version of *IONESCOPADE* wasn't exactly a hit, but Joe was. At one of the show's few performances, the casting director for *THE MAGIC SHOW* saw him perform, and called him to audition. Joe hesitated, but was pursued, and because of his ability—and because as a child he had become interested in magic—he won the part of understudy to the magician in the road company.

The rest is almost like something out of a Hollywood musical. One night, Joe went on for the lead, was seen by a critic from a magician's magazine, and received a rave. This was followed by an offer from Doug Henning to work on his TV special, "The World of Magic", which was, in turn, followed by a job as temporary Broadway understudy. That, in its turn, was followed by the lead in another road company in Buffalo, where Joe became such a smash, that he was given the role on Broadway when Doug Henning left.

And now, after having founded an off-off Broadway company, after attempting several times to leave the theatre and being called back at the last minute, and after effortlessly working his way up from chorus/understudy to Broadway star, Joe Abaldo modestly grins at his own good fortune.

"I still can't believe it," he laughs. "I'm sure any day I'll wake up and have to build sets for the New Repertory Co. In a way, I miss the autonomy of being part of an O-O-B Rep. group, where we made all the decisions ourselves. But I wouldn't trade what I have for anything."

—Debbi Wasserman

SOFIA LANDON



"At last my own career is blossoming," says pert and passionate Sofia Landon. The "at last" belies the teenage look of her 28 years, and refers mainly to her recent acclaim as Peg, in the Lion Theatre Company's revival of *PEG O' MY HEART*.

The 'coming together' of Sofia and Peg was in the best theatrical tradition. Director Gene Nye had seen her in Equity Library Theatre's *HEARTBREAK HOUSE*, and asked her if she'd play the role of the snobbish daughter in *PEG*. Then, the actress playing Peg left for another job, and Sofia was fortuitously given the role.

The two really important things in her life, other than her career, are closely entangled: her 'fiance', Michael Van Landingham, and the League of Theatre Artists—of which he is Executive Director. The League has about 35 members (some 20 are performers; others include technicians, directors, and a playwright). She describes the members as dedicated and very involved with each other—much like the Circle Rep. is, and the Group Theatre was!

The League recently received a Whitney Foundation grant, unusual for a new company, to undertake a search program to find a city ("close to New York, we hope") in which to found a resident theatre company. This may not happen for several years, and the League is meanwhile preparing for summer season at the Lexington Conservatory Theatre in upstate N.Y.

Sofia now wants to do roles that challenge her as an actress. For example, for this summer, she auditioned for the school-teacher in *PICNIC*, since "I could do Madge very easily." And she's anxious to get the Katherine Hepburn part in Barrie's *QUALITY STREET*. As Phoebe, she would have the chance at a tour-de-force role of a prim spinster transformed into a care-free young girl—which she assuredly could carry out with the same spirit and ingenuousness that she displays as Peg.

And although Sofia is getting more and more attention and auditions, for commercials and television and films, she vows she would "never lose touch with theatre, in general, and with this group, in particular."

—Ira J. Bilowit

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Critics' Roundtable

HENRY HEWES / JOHN SIMON / DAVID MAMET / JOSEPH BERUH
"AMERICAN BUFFALO"

(Editor's Note: The following transcript has been edited to conform with certain space limitations. The meaning has not been altered in any way. Because it was a spoken dialogue, the punctuation and grammar have sometimes become the prerogative of the editor. The participants have not seen this written transcript prior to publication.—I.J.B.)

Hewes: I am delighted that AMERICAN BUFFALO is with us. The playwright who revealed himself last year in SEXUAL PERVERSITY IN CHICAGO and DUCK VARIATIONS is obviously one of the most gifted of all the playwrights we've had. He introduces a dialogue which is at once realistic and at the same time has a poetry in it that is touching, a rhythm that takes it deeper than just in the surface dialogue. AMERICAN BUFFALO, which I suppose you could say on the surface is a play about numismatics, becomes with this low class dialogue, a play about the betrayal of individuals, about the morality that people use words to escape from.

The words are almost like traffic islands in this play. Sometimes the dialogue hides violence, sometimes it is the trigger for violence. The play is funny, and no matter how much you may disapprove of it, any part of it, no matter how impatient you may be that there is not more plot, you're constantly held by this play in a way that few other plays do. I have a certain reservation about the circular shape of the play, because at the end of it, I don't think that really an awful lot has happened, in the sense of plot. However an awful lot has happened in the sense of emotional tides being turned loose and then damned up again.

Simon: I must confess that glad as I am to see David Mamet on Broadway, I shall probably be gladder with future plays than I am about this one. The danger, it seems to me, is to be very good at something, and then to fall totally thrall to that something, which in Mamet's case is an understanding of how people speak. Mr. Mamet has been quite rightly praised for his extremely sensitive ear and ability to reproduce different types of speech in different social and geographical strata, and that is a wonderful thing to have. But of course that is the *minimal* rather than the *maximal* equipment for any serious writer, be he playwright, novelist or anything else.

Of course, Mr. Mamet goes beyond that, and he takes these fallibilities and lapses and quirks and absurdities of var-

ious types of human speech, and does make out of them a kind of absurdist poetry, so that the absurdities in a way begin to comment on themselves, and also at the same time to fashion a fabric of glittering inanities, so to speak. Which, never the less, has its pathos, too. That's all very well, but it still never gets beyond language. And even though I am known as a champion of language, and as a passionate lover of language, I can not help feeling an affrontiveness with a play like AMERICAN BUFFALO... a little bit, more than a little bit, as I feel when I'm confronted with a play by Robert Wilson, if "play" is the word for such a concoction where the opposite problem exists; that is, language has been kicked out, stamped on, bruised into total non-existence. And everything is visual, everything

single device such as attention to verbal detail, than a longer, more extended, more promising and therefore more demand-raising structure. And also in those earlier plays, he dealt with more sympathetic figures and we therefore had a kind of automatic sympathy for two old Jewish farts on a bench, or conversely for four silly but still ultimately likable young people. Well, not so likable, but at least recognizable and having something in them that we all have. This was automatically a help in accepting their frivolities and their verbalizings and their marking time and their minor ineffectual would-be perversities.

Whereas here, we have three totally unsympathetic characters caught in a very static situation, involved in some kind of mumbo jumbo whose ultimate

Robert Duvall
John Savage
Kenneth McMillan
in AMERICAN BUFFALO



is just a parade of, more or less, spectacular and sometimes very dull visual effects. . . . It seems to me that the answer is not to have a theatre that is purely verbal, any more than it is to have a theatre that is purely anti-verbal.

In a play like AMERICAN BUFFALO, I may have expected more than I did from DUCK VARIATIONS and SEXUAL PERVERSITY IN CHICAGO, because it's a full length play, and it's a play in which a Broadway debut is being made. And also because it was heralded by Wetzton and others in the Village Voice as Mr. Mamet's best. And I, not having caught it on its off-off Broadway outing, really expected it to be that. But it does not seem to me to be Mr. Mamet's best. I was rather disappointed when I was confronted with a play that did not go beyond DUCK VARIATIONS and SEXUAL PERVERSITY. It rather fell short of it.

Those earlier plays, one-act structures, can be more easily serviced by a sort of

meaning escapes us. . . . It's vaguely possible that I fell asleep when something explanatory was offered, but I'm inclined to blame that little bit on the playwright too. Anyway, I find that in this play, the cleverness is still visible. But the lack, and the need for something beyond the verbal cleverness, cries out, and remains, as I see it, unfulfilled.

Hewes: I think we've been conditioned, on Broadway at least, to want more story and more development of theme than David Mamet always wants to give us in his plays. And I have privately encouraged him to make his plays into plays that have more of what I consider would make this experience more memorable and more satisfying. On the other hand, I think that all of us, as critics, have tried to wrestle with the way theatre is changing over the last few years. We've been forced into a position of saying, if the painter and the musician do not have to provide us with these extra dimensions, why should

Critics' Roundtable

"AMERICAN BUFFALO"

we require the playwright to do so. Isn't it enough that a playwright writes beautiful language and keeps a dramatic tension going over a two-hour period? And in the course of it, certain things are revealed, perhaps not as much as we want. I find, as a critic, it's making it very difficult for me.

When I first came into the theatre, we always used to say, well the second act doesn't work or the third act needs this and so on. Now, you can't do that with many of these plays. Yours or John Guare's. And I don't know what to do. Are the critics doing a disservice to some of them by overpraising Mr. Mamet's work, so that he is encouraged to go on writing plays that have this lack of something that we are used to requiring of a play?

Bilowit: Are you calling that structure?

Hewes: Well, maybe, but I wouldn't say as much structure as story, for my part.

Simon: How about plot? Well, I don't think that that's a Broadway requirement, when you say that we've become used to plot and story. I think it was Aristotle who was the first to hazard this aspect or need or element of drama as one of the crucial and necessary elements. Now, Aristotle wasn't god and Aristotle may have been wrong. Nevertheless, his ideas have worked pretty well for the theatre for a good many centuries, not to say eons. And it's a little risky to futz around with that. Mind you, some great artists of the theatre have done that and have gotten away with it. But there's another problem at work. I'm glad you brought up this parallel with the visual arts, and perhaps music is a good element too.

I think what has happened somewhere toward the end of the 19th century—I think it begins with the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé, whom I admire very much—is that the arts became self-referential. More and more, poetry was about the writing of the poet, painting was about the painting of the picture, so that with the abstract expressionists, finally, it's no longer what is on the canvas that matters, but the action of putting that stuff becomes of primary and visually artistic significance, hence the term "action" painting. Well, I think a little of this goes a very, very long way. And I think the human mind should experiment with everything possible and available. But it should also call it quits when something has been exhausted, when it has become a glut and a source of nausea. . . . Because finally it is not of consuming interest to the world how a poem is written or how a play is put together or how the words of a play become the totality of that play. . . .

I think it's perfectly all right, especially

because he's so very young, for Mr. Mamet to experiment with these things and to achieve his small successes with them. But I think for bigger things, he will need to expand his horizons.

Hewes: Referring to what you said about self-referentialness, I don't think that people enjoy his plays because they can see the workings of how they're made. I think people enjoy his plays because they are very funny, and because the dialogue is so good.

Now, in these days when playwrights tend to live more on grants than they do on royalties, we've encouraged a whole generation of playwrights to whom we say "Write the way you want it," just the same way you'd say to a painter, "Paint it the way you want it." Whereas the authors of previous generations, if their plays failed on Broadway, they were very receptive. You had Tennessee Williams up in the hotel room rewriting his second act. Which is better?

Mamet: I certainly wouldn't quarrel with the notion of the Aristotelian unities. I take no issue with anything that Mr. Simon says, with the possible exception of the fact that it pertains to my work.

Aristotle comes along and he says that as a proscriptive formula we have to have unity of action in a play. And Stanislavski comes along at the beginning of the 20th century and says perhaps this is not a proscriptive formula, perhaps it's a descriptive formula. And he describes the process of perception that one goes through when one views a play. That is to say that not as any god-given fiat must we have a unity of action in a play, but solely because the audience comes in and the curtain goes up, they see a play for two or three hours and they come away. We're going to internalize that experience, as a totality, and because of that, because of that, because of the nature of perception, you'd better jolly well make sure that we have a unity of action in a play. . . .

Simon: I'm not asking for unity of action. I'm asking for any bloody kind of action whatsoever.

Mamet: And right you are to ask for it. I think that it is absolutely essential that every beat in a play put forward the action, that every word in a play put forward the action. And any word of a play which does not put forward the action, must be excised from the play. And that any point in the play where the action takes too great a leap or turns back upon itself, that point in the play must be corrected. I believe that, completely, strongly. . . .

Those points at which the attention of the audience will lag, where the audience will in effect nap, those points, no matter

how brilliant the dialogue is, no matter how exciting the stage action is, those points which are not essential to the action of the play—to what happens next—must be corrected. I agree completely. I couldn't agree more. I don't, however, feel that it applies to *AMERICAN BUFFALO*.

Beruh: I would only quote the line in the play that says "He (Simon) missed it."

Mamet: Well, that's what I think, too. And I remember, in the rehearsal process, going over the lines, rehearsing the play and working on the script for several very intensive months with Ulu Grosbard, and I'd say, "For Christ sake Ulu, isn't this getting a little bit, isn't this getting a little bit super-real, isn't this getting a little bit, too . . . ?" I thought the play was getting almost melodramatic, in the extent to which the plot, the action was stressed. I'd say, "For Christ sake, aren't we getting a little bit obvious here?" And he'd say, "No."

Simon: In answer to Mr. Beruh, I would like to say that there are two ways of missing a train. One, because one gets there too late; and one, because the train isn't running that day.



Mamet: That's certainly true too.

Beruh: Listen, let me say a word here because I'm outclassed here with the three of you, all big writers. And I'm not an intellectual, and I just speak in very basic, basic terms. For me, art is communication. In other words, if something moves me, I assume I have taste, and I would say therefore it is good. . . .

In this play in particular, everybody goes on the language and some people pick on the swearing or that type of thing in the language. To me, any kind of language, whether it be used by these three low class individuals or anyone, is only to express an idea. And I don't think I'm crazy, but when I finished reading this play, for some inexplicable reason, what went through my mind was *America*. I felt that here was a writer who by the nature of his work was going to try to take on the responsibility of a social awareness. And that is something that the theatre gave up to popular music. And anything I can do to bring that back to the theatre, I will do, because I feel it's our responsibility.

Critics' Roundtable

You see, I got tired of people telling me, "Well, I can't understand, I can't understand. How could Nixon have let himself get involved in Watergate? What could he have wanted there? The election was won. What could have been? I don't understand it." Well, after I read this play, I understood it. And I understood how IT&T, during the second world war, could sit with the Germans in Switzerland and sit with the Americans and play both sides, so that whoever wins, they have the telephone rights for Belgium and France and all those countries. I'm not saying I didn't understand it before, but it made it a little clearer to me. So the play had great meaning to me: that he captured America—unfortunately, the ills of it.

And when I hear a line in the play, and I read it, where the Bobby Duvall character is saying to the guy, "Loyalty in a situation like this don't mean shit," my image goes to the conversation between Haldeman and Nixon and Erlichman, saying, "We're going to set up John Dean." And they say to Nixon, "Set up John Dean? How can we do that? He's one of us!" And Nixon answers, "Loyalty in a situation like this don't mean shit." That's what the play means to me.

Now, I have to go back to "art is communication", so I have to say that I don't feel that it should be necessary for David to communicate with you or with you or with you. If he can communicate with, I'll use the word "masses" in quotes, then it's art, because that's who he's writing for. . . . There's something happening on that stage every minute. I give David great credit. I give Ulu Grosbard tremendous credit. But I think you have to seriously *listen* to this play. And we stopped doing that in the theatre. . . .

Hewes: David, did you take IT&T and Watergate and say, now I'm going to reproduce in my situation, the same kind of moral waffling that went on in the White House and in the halls of high business?

Mamet: No, but in the period when I first began to write the play, I was doing a lot of reading and I was reading a lot of Theodore Dreiser stuff and I had just started reading Thorstein Veblen too. And I was playing a lot of poker with people who were very much like the people in the play. And the question which constantly arose in my mind was, "What in the world is going on here?" The fiction, whereby we the men in this country, in the aid of which we conduct our lives—the fiction of loyalty, the fiction of business and the

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fiction of self-improvement, is patently dissolving. It no longer supports us, it no longer makes us feel good. And the moral fabric of, that is to say our perception of, the government, of those institutions whereon we peg, or at least give lip service to, the church and so on, we care for less and less.

Our ideals are quite obviously completely out of line with the way in which we conduct our lives. And the area in which it most fascinated me was in the area of business. Which, as Veblen says, the myth of American business is nothing other than the sheerest mask for predatory behavior. . . . masking fraud and masking theft and masking death. And the things that we're taught in school: we're taught to salute the flag, and to improve ourselves under the auspices and under the wing of huge corporations. You know, the whole Horatio Alger myth in this country that we give ourselves, is nothing other than self-enslavement and fraud, and that's this country.

Hewes: In this case, you have three ineffectual people using these slogans so that they become patently absurd, whereas when you have Nixon and Haldeman and Erlichman doing it, it's not so absurd.

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Critics' Roundtable

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Mamet: But that's the American myth again, Henry. The question is, here are people who are engaged in theft, and you say that they are absurd because they failed. The question is would they be more laudable if they succeed?

Hewes: They're see-throughable immediately by the audience, and almost by themselves.

Mamet: Well, God bless them, then, if they are. Because it's the same thing that goes on in board rooms all over this country. It's the same thing that goes on in advertising agencies, eh? How can we get the American people to bend over. If we win, eh, if we win, we're successful and we give ourselves awards in advertising and we give ourselves awards in the motion picture academy, eh? And we give ourselves awards in a weekend at Palm Beach. And if we lose, we're on the unemployment lines and we're having food-stamps and poverty comes in the door and love goes out the window. But what's the difference? I mean *what* are we trying to succeed in aid of?

Simon: This is all very interesting. The only trouble with it is that it's more interesting than *AMERICAN BUFFALO*. . . I disregarded this whole notion of a parallel between *AMERICAN BUFFALO* and Watergate as press agentry. . . That struck me as an inept way of selling the play. Because if Mr. Mamet had really wanted to write about Watergate, I think he would have done it in a more pungent and more unmistakable way—even though subtly. Obviously it is meant to be a take-off on American big business. The only trouble is that it is done in so remote, and so minute, in so filigree a way that I would say that 99% of the audience misses the point completely, or to a very large extent.

Now of course I disagree with Mr. Beruh. I don't think that we have art in there when and if and in order to reach the masses. I think that anything that reaches the masses is almost ipso facto *never* art, and here it's not an opinion speaking, it's a fact speaking, and you can read up in any history of the drama or poetry or whatever you want and see that the great playwrights and the great poets were almost without exception, misunderstood, rejected, ignored.

Mamet: What were you speaking in support of now?

Simon: That's the question. In other words, when you're praising *AMERICAN BUFFALO* because we finally have a play that's going to reach the masses,

you're doing it a great disservice.

Beruh: The people who are coming in to the theatre, that's only 1/100th of 1/10th of 1% of the American people. I should use my word "masses" in quotes. The people who are coming to the theatre, are going out and talking. Otherwise how could we go from \$12,000 in previews to \$29,000 after the reviews came out, \$29,000 after the reviews, going to \$32,000, going to \$36,000, and this week probably \$50,000. It's word of mouth. There've been no better reviews. There has only been one bad review, from Kerr, who missed everything completely.

Simon: I don't think so. I find myself in considerable sympathy with Kerr's review, which I don't usually do.

Beruh: But why are the people going to the theatre, going out and telling other people that they must see this play? Because that's the only thing that can go \$29,000-\$32,000-to \$36,000 to \$50,000 this week.

Simon: You cannot set any kind of stock by the fact that all of our bright critics today are all hailing *AMERICAN BUFFALO*. Critics are idiots, by and large, just as other people are idiots, by and large, and whether they understand or misunderstand is of no consequence whatsoever, in the eternal scope of things. What *is* of consequence, however, is that there is an audience that is a snob audience and that feels it must go to see the "in" things, whether they're movies or plays or ballets or anything else. And they go. But the numbers of this snob audience are by no means unlimited. And once you use them up, there is no refill to be had.

Mamet: The question of whether or not the play's going to be a success is arguable, and time will certainly tell on that score. But the question here, I think, is basically an irreconcilable difference between myself and Mr. Simon. And it's by no means an aesthetic difference, because I think we're both in the same camp on that score.

One should apply definitely traditional tests—one of which is the Aristotelian unity of action, and more than that is an age old traditional test of what is the author trying to do and how well does he do it? And how worthy is it of being said, which is the point upon which you and I differ. And which is irreconcilable, I believe. Because I feel that there is something important, whether you choose to characterize it as about Watergate or about America, in terms of what the theatre should do. I feel it's about what's

happening in our lives now. And I'm perfectly willing, using the same aesthetic criteria that you use, to stand and fall on the decision which will take, in the last analysis, years to be totally rendered. Whether you are vindicated or whether I am vindicated will be a matter of time.

Simon: Well, I think you see, to me, that the way the impact of the play would not have been missed, is if the characters had been a little closer up the scale to the ultimate objectives that you are aiming at. For most audiences, and even for perfectly intelligent people, I think it is very hard to make the connection between what these three schlumps out of nowhere and in nowhere, and between what IT&T . . .

Beruh: We expect the critics to do that for us.

Simon: But the critics can't do that much for anybody. They can't even do that much for themselves.

Mamet: But that's part of the play. What Gene Debs says, "While there is a lower class, I'm of it; and while there is a criminal class, I'm of it; and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free." He's not speaking that way because he is a saint, which he may very well have been. But he's describing the plight of all of us in America.

My point in the play is that as much as we might not like to think so, these people are us. And as Thorstein Veblen says, the behavior on this level, in the lumpen proletariat, the delinquent class, and the behavior on the highest levels of society, in the most rarified atmospheres of the board room and the most rarified atmospheres of the leisure class, is exactly identical. The people who create nothing, the people who do nothing, the people who have all sorts of myths at their disposal to justify themselves and their predators—and they steal from us. They rob the country spiritually and they rob the country financially.

Simon: But if you'd told us in terms of Exxon and IT&T, I think you'd have really got at the heart of the matter.

Mamet: Yes.

Hewes: I certainly would agree that there's a common denominator between all of us and the people in this play. Even though we're more educated and live with a different life style. And certainly the things that happen to the people in this play, the man who is confounded when he has to look through the coin catalogue when he has to go in and rob the man's coins, I dare say that if you had the same

job to look through a catalogue in an hour and then to go in and find the correct coins, that you would be equally confounded. These things transfer to me very easily.

The things that don't transfer, and I don't think that David necessarily expects them to transfer, is making the connection between this and higher forms of business practice. Now some of the sloganeering that people use to reassure themselves about the morality of what they're doing, *that* is common to people in every walk of life. I think that we're probably less prone to it as critics, because we're always analyzing, always suspecting things. But most people in life do require some kind of moral justification for what they're doing and they leap to these phrases, which when analyzed become contradictory and sometimes very silly and very funny. And I would say that if this play wasn't funny, it wouldn't. . . .

Simon: I hate to be excessively Brechtian here, but I think there is such a thing as hiding the lowest common denominator so successfully that no one can find it. Almost no one can find it. And I think that is the problem here, particularly with the funniness you mention. Not for nothing, I think, did Brecht ask for a certain alienation, so that the moral message can come through more clearly. Here, I think the funniness—which is not my kind of funniness, I must confess, but seems to be other people's—is such that underneath the jolly scatological and obscene phraseology, which I am sure accounts for 50% of the play's success, possibly more, people don't look for anything more. They're so happy to hear those "fucks" and "shits" come in at them in a shower of obscenity, that they're perfectly content to lose any other meaning that may be there. And I think that that's partly the people's fault, but I think it's also partly the play's fault, in that it makes its analogy on too remote, on too small, on too feeble a level.

Mamet: Now let's retract for a second. Either the play has a meaning or it doesn't. If it doesn't have a meaning, then the play certainly cannot be served by the language that I've employed to put forward the meaning. If the play does have a meaning, then the language which has been employed either puts forward the meaning or it doesn't. So we can't have it all ways. Either the play has a meaning or it doesn't. You say that it doesn't.

Simon: I say that the play can have a remote meaning for a very small number of people.

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Critics' Roundtable

Mamet: Who are these people?

Simon: Well, the people who, as I say, go at it with intense, analytical, critical, intellectual scrutinizing tools. And so dissect the meaning out of the play.

Mamet: Yes.

Simon: And of course you might say that in the cases of high art, that is usually the way things work. But I think what makes high art interesting is that it works on so many levels. And that there is something there for everyone. But now comes the important qualification. . . .

Mamet: But now you're contradicting yourself.

Simon: No, no, no, no I'm not . . . that what is there for the masses is on a much lower, much humbler level, not *different* from what is there for the high level. Whereas in a different kind of play that is of lesser value, there may be something for everybody. But what is there for the masses, is on a very different and cruder nature and has no relationship to what is there for the best and keenest and most concerned minds. And that kind of split, that kind of schizoidness is not to the praise and not to the glory and not to the value of the play, but rather to its weakness.

Mamet: Then this is the essential difference between yourself and me . . . having acquiesced that there is in fact a meaning to the play, what you're saying is that the meaning is inaccessible, eh?

Simon: Yes.

Mamet: Okay. Now in doing so, I think what you're doing is making one of the errors, to my mind, in reasoning, which is at the essential core of the play. Which is that human behavior is something that someone else does. That it's possible to abstract oneself from one's position and say, "This is all right for me, because I understand, but it's not all right for them." Eh? Which is of the same nature when Tolstoy says that the great crimes are always committed in the name of public tranquility. Which is the same thing that Nixon says, "This is all right for me, but it's not all right for them." Which is the same thing that the *sacré coeur* in the play, Donny Dubrow, says, "This is all right for me, but it's not all right for Bobby who reasons less well than I."

Simon: Oh, but you are making a totally false analogy here. Because you're confusing moral and aesthetic levels. You are confusing ethical levels with intellectual, understanding, cognitive levels. They're both entirely different . . . apples and pears, no, apples and tractors. They cannot be compared.

Mamet: Well, I think . . .

Simon: No, let me finish. What the Nixonites say is what is morally justifiable for

me, is not morally justifiable for the masses. That is a hideous and untrue thing. But if I say that what I with great difficulty can unscramble out of a play, is not enough to feed the masses who ought to have something, something that they can get without my helping them, without my spoon-feeding them, without the critics telling them, "You have to like this play for such and such a reason." That kind of liking is not worth very much.

The only kind of liking that's worth anything is one that they can spontaneously and unaffectedly and uncorruptedly come by, and this I think doesn't happen. They enjoy the play, but they enjoy it for the wrong reasons. The moral value of the play, which for me is a very important one, maybe the most important one, is I think lost on them, and that's what I say isn't the same for them or for me.



I'm not campaigning for moral privileges or above the law status for myself. I'm only claiming a little more intelligence than they have, and I regret that the play is only accessible to me, and not to them. And then I must add that it's not even accessible to me in the way that I would want it to be accessible. Which is to say that it is the kind of intellectual satisfaction that one may get if one thinks about it very closely, by and by. But I think, and here I'm being an anti-intellectualist, because I'm not a complete intellectualist, I think, I also want emotional satisfaction from the thing as it goes along. I also want to feel humanly involved with the thing, and then, afterwards, find the philosophical and theological . . . And that I don't get from the play.

Mamet: Well, there's certainly no argument with that. You paid for your ticket and saw the show . . .

Simon: Well, I didn't pay for it, but . . .

Mamet: Okay.

Simon: I paid for it by having to see ten thousand other plays year in and year out, and that's paying enough.

Mamet: You seem to be playing both sides of the street on a couple of issues, John. . . . What I think is an important point, and I'm certainly not going to characterize your attitude as totalitarian, is the attitude that the moral and the aesthetic are separable, that it's possible to appreciate the play on a moral level, on a philosophic level, on an ethical level, and

"AMERICAN BUFFALO"

to appreciate it in a completely different way on an aesthetic level. And I think what Aristotle is saying, and certainly what Stanislavski is saying, in speaking of the unity of action in a descriptive way, is that the two are interlocked, that the two are inseparable, that the ethical interchange is an aesthetic interchange. Which is a rule for a precept upon which I'm willing to let my play be judged.

Simon: Well, I think that in a play that works, those things become fused, but in a play that, as I see it, doesn't work, those things do not become fused, and therein lies the trouble.

Mamet: I couldn't agree with you more.

Hewes: But this play has been more praised for its aesthetic virtues than it has for its moral virtues.

Mamet: Well, let's wait and see. That's my attitude.

Simon: What I'm saying is that one cannot invoke a double standard legally, because before the law, we're all the same. But I think there is such a thing as a double standard intellectually, because intellectually, we're not all the same. And there is such a thing as a play working for a very small minority of intellectuals who can read a great deal out of it, and not working at all for the rest of the people. Or working for them in a totally wrong way. And thus being here today and gone tomorrow, like a Neil Simon farce which I hope none of us takes very seriously. And that's, then, a great minus for a Mamet play—that it becomes reduced to a Neil Simon farce. And yet I think in the public view, if it is successful at all, it will be successful for those reasons. And then there is a split personality in that play, and that is to be avoided at all costs.

Mamet: I couldn't agree with you more. I just *don't* think that your argument, or your question, applies to *this* play. There's our basic difference.

Simon: Only time will tell.

Billowit: You said before, about John, maybe he missed it. Does it matter if somebody says they don't understand it and if somebody feels there's not enough action—if you were to admit that some of that is true—is it still a valid theatrical experience?

Beruh: For me it is.

Mamet: That's up to the audience.

Beruh: John is saying it's not for him.

Billowit: Do you think it matters as a writer?

Mamet: I think it matters as a writer, because as a writer I want everybody, pre-consciously anyway, to adore everything I've ever done.

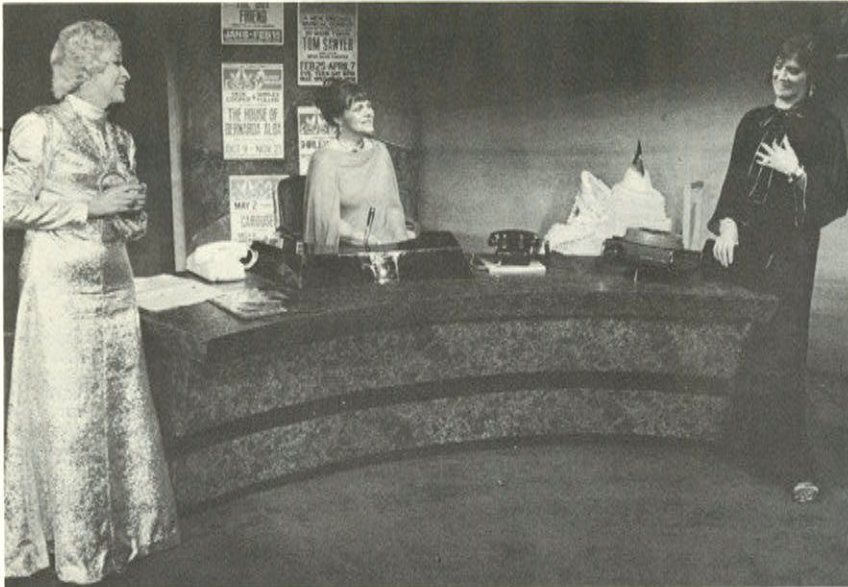
Hewes: You're not primarily a didactic writer, are you?

Mamet: I don't think so, no. Intellectually, I would like them to understand it, but emotionally I want them to like it.

Paul Zindel's LADIES AT THE ALAMO

ACT ONE — THE AMBUSH
ACT TWO: THE MASSACRE

The occasion of the play is the opening night of a new Texas theatre complex, called the Alamo. The Ladies doing battle, in a series of seesaw power plays, are: DEDE, the Executive Director (Estelle Parsons) and BELLA, director of the Children's Theatre Program (Eileen Heckart); versus JOANNE, Chairman of the Board (Rosemary Murphy), SUITS, Joanne's personal companion/secretary (Susan Peretz), and SHIRLEY, a fading movie star who had her start at the Old Alamo (Jan Farrand).



1) (Bella, Dede, Joanne) Dede has asked Joanne to a private "talk" prior to the meeting of the Board of Directors; she has heard that Joanne plans to attack her regime at that meeting.



2) (Joanne, Dede) Announcing that Dede is unqualified to run an expanded theatre complex, Joanne says that she's withdrawing her financial support unless Shirley is brought in as co-director. The implication is clear that Dede and Bella are on their way out.



5) (Dede, Joanne) Having gained the upper hand, Dede threatens Joanne, literally and figuratively. The weapon: a bull's organs. "I've listened to your bullshit all night... right now, Texas doesn't like dykes."

3) (Dede, Suits, Joanne, Bella) Blackmail and "black" secrets run rampant, as the troops gather to take sides. Angered at Bella's verbal assault on Joanne, Suits throws Bella to the floor, whereupon the unflustered Bella "dials" a telephone number and reveals Suits' secret: her late-night visits to Shirley's room many seasons ago, and their relationship.



4) (Dede, Suits, Bella) Desperately, Suits tries to explain her feelings for Shirley, though she knows that they have lost the battle, have been massacred.



6) (Dede, Bella) Victorious together, Dede and Bella have a "laughing jag", as we hear, over the intercom, the closing words of the opening night play from the theatre below.



Photos by MARTHA SWOPE

Theatre REVIEWS

AMERICAN BUFFALO at the Barrymore Theatre

Review by IRA J. BILOWIT



SAVAGE/McMILLAN

(A play by David Mamet, produced by Edgar Lansbury and Joseph Beruh, directed by Ulu Grosbard, set by Santo Loquasto, lighting by Jules Fisher, cast: Robert Duvall, Kenneth McMillan, John Savage.)

AMERICAN BUFFALO is not so much a play as an emotional experience that evokes the audience's ambivalent feelings of hostility/compassion. It is the expression, often in crystallized obscurities, of the futility of some people's lives.

Essentially, it is the story of three men, involved in a bungling plan to steal a presumed coin collection:

Donny, who runs a Chicago junk/antique store, with a little larceny/fencing on the side; Bobby, a young unregenerated addict, in whom Donny takes, at least, a paternal interest; and Teach, a small-time hood who is dumb enough to think he's a big-time operator.

But that is only the framework for a study of their unfulfilled lives, which Mamet skeletally builds. While symbolically, they may represent middle-class America hopelessly imprisoned by society, or even an unprincipled society preying on itself, theatrically, they represent three losers, in a trap, a triangle, in which

Teach vies with Bobby for Donny's approval and acceptance.

Despite the sensitive, studied direction of Ulu Grosbard, and the superbly intense interplaying by Robert Duvall, Kenneth McMillan, and John Savage, ensconced in Santo Loquasto's overwhelmingly realistic set, the totality remains mostly an emotional response. Mamet's selective, overly-distilled tough-guy dialogue creates a barrier, rather than a filter, for the characters. There is some sense of dramatic tension, but no dramatic action. We are left with a taut-but-theatrically dormant visit with three unsympathetic characters.

THE DOUBLE INCONSTANCY

at Theatre of Riverside Church
Review by SY SYNA

(A three-act comedy by Marivaux, produced by Anita L. Thomas, translated and directed by Albert Asenely, set design and music by Thom Edlun, lighting by Al Sayers, costumes by Roy Finamore, choreography by David K. Manion. Cast: Meryl Burro, Josh Clark, Sharon Devonish, Sol Frieder, Jeanne Hartman, Heather Lupton, Mark Russel, Mel Shrawder, and Marie Thomas.)

Though written for the Italian

Commedia dell'Arte troupe in residence in Paris in 1723, THE DOUBLE INCONSTANCY still appears fresh and honest. The translation is supple, and the euphemisms and made-up words for which Marivaux was famous, come across as modern and slangy.

The real fun of the play is in watching Silvia and Harlequin, both devoted to each other, slowly won over to love somebody else. Both Silvia and Harlequin have a

naive egotism that's a delight to behold. The machinations of the court sophisticates who try every ploy, are amusing.

The production's not as good as the play. Most of the cast is phony and forced, while the costumes are garish and poor—a compromise between modern dress and the 18th century. However, Heather Lupton as Silvia is magnificent. This is a young actress able to suggest a daffiness and vulnerability that's en-

dearing to behold. Sol Frieder, a wonderful old character actor, plays a hard-pressed major-domo. Mark Russel is quite funny in a brief bit as an arch nobleman acting as a power broker. Mel Shrawder's prince is honest and appealing. Thom Edlun's harpsichord score catches the feeling of the era, as does his marble-floored setting.

This play is such a treat, it's astonishing this production represents the New York premiere.

THE GATHERING

at the Manhattan Theatre Club
Review by ED MORAN

(A new play by Edna O'Brien, produced by the Manhattan Theatre Club, directed by Austin Pendleton, set by Patricia Woodbridge, costumes by Kenneth M. Yount, lighting by Cheryl Thacker. Cast: Jane Cronin, Nancy Donohue, Barbara Edwards, John Galloway, Alan Mixon, Molly Scoville, Sloane Shelton, Maria Tucci and Louis Zorich.)

There's no doubt that playwright Edna O'Brien knows full well all the convoluted inner sanctums of the Irish mind. She peoples THE GATHERING not with stock, stage-Irish characters, but with living individuals who can go from the soul of meekness one moment to raging, pig-blind lummoxry the next. This play has strands of the

ancient Celtic tribalism; of sentimental Catholic devotion; of the modern Irish Diaspora by which children must exile themselves from family and homeland in order to find out who they are—and can be.

One frequently feels that THE GATHERING is good essay, but poor theatre. It is a rambling, somewhat prolix piece full of characters in search of a point to make. Restless like the Irish character?

Although Edna O'Brien leads us up and down Irish byways and shows us the countryside to boot, she may be mimicking the O'Shea family's failure to face reality. There's only one example of

dramatic tension—late in the final act when Jamie O'Shea, patriarch of the brood, demands that his errant children stand up and be counted on the question whether or not he should sell the family estate to make way for a factory. (A hint



TUCCI/SHELTON

of a larger conflict now going on in a largely peasant Ireland.) This scene is spellbinding, but it's too little and too late.

Three actors help this play considerably. Maria Tucci, who plays Emer, the daughter who has become a writer, capably presents the anguished conflict of a woman torn between her own insight and her filial devotion. Sloane Shelton is remarkable as Peg, the daughter who has gone off to South Africa: she combines a caustic wit with a let-your-hair-down attitude that adds a comic tone to the play. And of course there's Louis Zorich as father Jamie, big-boned and bell-cose, but with a soft-hearted, somewhat-may attitude.

HOLD ME!

at the Chelsea Westside Theatre
Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A play by Jules Feiffer, produced by The American Place Theatre, The American Humorists Series, directed by Caymichael Patten, sets by Kert Lundell, costumes by Ruth Morley, lighting by Edward M. Greenberg, choreography by Daliene Majors, cast: Geraldine Brooks, Kathleen Chalfant, Paul Dooley, Daliene Majors and Michael Tucci.)

"Feiffer's People" are back. This time, they have been assembled into theatrical sketches which delve into the logically illogical world of Feiffer's Village Voice cartoons.

Once again, we meet Bernard Mergendeiler, the perennial loser. Once again, we encounter the archetypical Man-Against-Machine whose washing machine demands: "Stop trifling with the laws of nature and bring . . . more socks!" And, of course, once again, we watch the continually aborted dances of Feiffer's willowy modern dancer.

Feiffer's sketches are universal. They are funny because they show us ourselves without getting too personal. And they are most effective

when performed like a vaudeville of well-timed line drawings—not too many layers; just enough to let the dialogue and basic human traits shine through.

In presenting these characteristics, the cast is essentially successful. Taking their appointed places in and around Kert Lundell's appropriate caricature of a set, they create small pools of life. Daliene Majors is an ideal Feiffer dancer, from her angular looks to her perfectly choreographed movements; Michael Tucci is touchingly ludicrous as

Bernard; Paul Dooley presents a variety of roles with comic ease; Kathleen Chalfant, though sometimes heavy-handed, does well, and despite her "preciousness," Geraldine Brooks is often funny.

Caymichael Patten's direction is not as effective as the acting. Her simple-but-careful staging has merit. However, the show's timing is often too fast, so that "punch lines" are lost or overemphasized.

But no matter, Feiffer's people overcome small hurdles. Their message is always clear.

THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA

at INTAR

Review by IRA J. BILOWIT

(A play by Garcia Lorca; produced by teatro hispano, directed by Max Ferra; sets & lights by Sally Locke; costumes by Betty Chylstek; asst. director, John Monge; sound by Felipe Napoles. Cast: Marjorie Austrian, Alex Bernard, Connie Marie Cicone, Nancy V. Cook, Tamara Daniel, Eileen Fitzpatrick, Gerry Lou, Elisa Morgan, Peg Osborne, Caroline Sidney, Caroline Thomas.)

Whether they are dirges or love songs, Lorca's plays all sing with poetry. But in this *BERNARDA ALBA*, director Max Ferra has chosen to mute the lyric passion, and cloak it instead in ritual and mood. While he succeeds in establishing the feeling of imprisoned, depressed women, regulated by society and mores—he does it at the expense of the dramatic soul of Lorca's women.

In his ritualistic approach, he

impersonalizes the characters. Thus, Poncia, the veteran family servant, becomes like a Greek chorus, a collective commentary; and although skillfully played by Peg Osborne, she seems more the Joycean washerwoman than the classical retainer. Also, the personalities and playing styles of the five sisters are more alike than distinct. Although we see in Martirio the development of the next-generation-Bernarda, we never get the link-up of Bernarda with her

mother. Connie Marie Cicone's Amelia is the only character that evokes any empathy. And while we are made to look upon Adela's bared breasts at her window, we are not permitted to see even a shadow of her final escape through suicide.

The level of acting throughout is generally good (if inapt), but saddled in the passionless ceremonial posture, and in Sally Locke's interesting but ambiguous setting, we are left with a flat and unfeeling theatrical result.

PEG O' MY HEART

at the Lion Theatre Company

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A play by J. Hartley Manners, produced by the Lion Theatre Company, production by Gene Nye, scenery by Miguel Romero, lighting by Joseph Spencer, costumes by David James; cast: Allan Carlsen, Ken Costigan, Gibson Glass, Sofia Landon, Julia MacKenzie, Jim Ricketts, Donovan Sylvest, Kathleen Tremaine and Mary E. Baird.)

PEG O' MY HEART was written for Laurette Taylor by her finance J. Hartley Manners, so naturally, it is a tour-de-force for any Peg. And Sofia Landon certainly measures up to the role.

As the energetically impish waif who invades the stuffy British Chichester home. Ms. Landon is an ingenious ball of fire. She sprints and gambols with ease, in and around Miguel Romero's well-structured set. And she plays off of the other actors, as if improvising.

The degree to which they respond depends upon their talents and the effects of Gene Nye's erratic direction. Allen Carlsen, for instance, transmits a delightfully relaxed feeling of warmth and receptivity which suits his romantic role of Jerry. The polished Julia MacKenzie also handles well the variety of reactions which her character, Ethel Chiches-



LANDON/CARLSEN

ter, has towards Peg. And as the maid, Mary E. Baird enjoys the situation thoroughly.

The rest of the company, all excellently costumed by David James, vary widely. When they are directed to hold firm to the comedy's mannered style, they provide acceptable foils for Ms. Landon's Peg—although most of them are essentially weak in that technique. And when the direction drops the stylization, rough edges show through and we lose sight of the directorial perspective.

Yet, even with these difficulties, the play works. It's hard to keep from being carried away by Ms. Landon and her antics.

THE DYBBUK

at Impossible Ragtime Theatre

Review by ED MORAN

(A play by S. Ansky, produced by the Impossible Ragtime Theatre, directed by Stephen Zuckerman, scene design by Franco Colavecchia; light design by Gary Porto, costumes by Sally J. Lesser and Kathleen Smith; music directed and composed by Michael S. Roth, dance staged by Sarah Chodoff. Cast: Gideon Davis, Bruce Kent, Nicolas Mize, Chester Clark, Michael Zuckerman, Jonathan Foster, E. E. Norris, Zivia Flomenhaft, Rosemary Foley, Mel Boudrot, Bruce A. Levitt, Matthew Lewis.)

The first impression of *THE*

DYBBUK is a lasting one: Franco Colavecchia's imaginative-though-simple setting. The audience enters from two ends of the arena to see ghostly figures chanting under a gauze-like curtain. As the play begins, the curtain is lifted slightly higher to become the roof of the synagogue at Brainitz; later, when the action moves outdoors to the square, it rises higher to become a willowy sky.

The aural and visual effects of this production are satisfying, and

even charming: the energetic dance of the ragged peasant women (portrayed by men) in the second act (it seems like a sudden rising of New York's shopping-bag ladies); the clear, stentorian chanting of Chester Clark as the messenger; the almost convulsive movements of the black-clad rabbis giving praise to their God; the lithe charms of the white-clad Leah, played with quiet intensity by Zivia Flomenhaft.

But there is nary a breath of air in the entire production. Director

Zuckerman piles heavy on heavy in his overzealous attempt to convince us of the seriousness of *THE DYBBUK*. Perhaps the problem is also the cramped playing area, with audience on two sides, but there is a definite sense of emotional claustrophobia—only rarely does a faint glimmer of lightness or humor break through. The production relies too heavily on intellectual severity rather than on development of character or interplay of emotion.

JOHNNY BELINDA

at the Joseph Jefferson Theatre

Review by LEAH D. FRANK

(A play by Elmer Harris, produced by the Joseph Jefferson Theatre Co., directed by William Koch, set design by Gerald Weinstein, cast: Reathel Bean, Jan Granger, Mark Hattan, Beverly Knapp, Linda Lashbrook, Frank Luz, Robert Lancaster, David Mack, June Stein, Ruth Wallman.)

Unhappily, not only does *JOHNNY BELINDA* not stand up under the passage of time, but this

production, which is slow and cumbersome, only serves to highlight its faults.

The sound effects, rather than working to set a mood, often drown out the actors' speeches. On the other hand, since the only actor worth mentioning is June Stein, who plays the mute Belinda, the overpowering background sounds may not have been a disservice to the production.

Ms. Stein, although she gets off to a slow start, does a splendid job of presenting the deaf mute sans hysteria or pity. She creates a Belinda who is sensitive, intelligent, and full of hope and love. This is a young actress whose development is worth watching.

William Koch's self-conscious direction does little to alleviate the play's inherent failures. He stages the scenes in a somber, somewhat

choppy manner, which is, at best, tiresome, and which prevents the characters' emotions from taking control of the stage.

However, the major problem here is the play, which is awkward and full of gaps in plot development, and which is not an effective theatre piece anymore. Everyone connected with this production is capable of better work.

CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA

at the Palace Theatre

Review by LEAH D. FRANK

(A play by George Bernard Shaw, produced by Elliot Martin and Gladys Rackmill and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in association with James Nederlander, directed by Ellis Rabb; sets by Ming Cho Lee; costumes by Jane Greenwood; lights by Thomas Skelton; cast: Elizabeth Ashley, Rex Harrison, Paul Hecht, Patrick Hines, Thom Christopher, James Valentine, Novella Nelson.)

Shaw's play has been analyzed and dissected by almost everyone. And now it's being presented on Broadway in a staging by Ellis Rabb that doesn't add any new dimensions, but perhaps because of its lack of intellectual pretension, settles quite comfortably onto the stage of the Palace Theatre, and cradles its two stars, Rex Harrison and Elizabeth Ashley, in its silkily soft cat's paw of a production.

Harrison gives his Caesar a wry, intelligent, and somewhat weary character. His resonant voice and his obvious mastery of his craft, couple to produce an often riveting performance, and even though he is always Rex Harrison and only secondarily Caesar, this is not an unkingly interpretation. The beautiful Elizabeth Ashley, as Cleopatra, slinks across the stage like a Siamese cat, cleverly commanding her fate

and developing from a playful kitten to a vicious panther of a Queen.

The real stars of this show, however, are Ming Cho Lee's delicate and imaginative settings, Jane Greenwood's lush costumes, and Thomas Skelton's dramatic lighting. This is a visually arresting production, conveying the sense of an Egyptian culture that is simultaneously rooted in antiquity and growing out of Broadway.

Theatre REVIEWS

BOESMAN AND LENA

at the Manhattan Theatre Club

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A play by Athol Fugard produced by Lynne Meadow and Barry Grove, directed by Thomas Bullard; setting by Atkin Pace; costumes by Rachel Kurland; lighting by Spencer Mosse. Cast: Robert Christian, Frances Foster and Paul Makgoba.)



CHRISTIAN
/ FOSTER

BOESMAN AND LENA is an emotional effect—a slowly blooming flower which reveals much about South Africa, about love, and about survival. This emotional effect is reached through several avenues: through Atkin Pace's detailed setting, through Rachel Kurland's earthy costumes and

Spencer Mosse's delicate lighting, and most of all, in Thomas Bullard's sensitive and well-structured direction.

BOESMAN AND LENA are "coloureds." They live off nature and their own cunning. Wandering from village to village, setting up makeshift lean-tos, they live from day to day, from meal to meal, from wine-jug to wine-jug, always ready for the inevitable moment when they will be forced to move on. Existing one notch above wild animals, they struggle to retain their own humanity, their sense of worth, their pride.

When we meet Robert Christian's silently argumentative Boesman, and Frances Foster's op-

timistically talkative Lena, they are returning once again to the mud-flats of the river Swartkops. We watch Mr. Christian's Boesman efficiently create shelter out of scraps; we listen to Ms. Foster's Lena desperately try to create substance out of her tenuous life by reciting the names of places they've been. And as we do, we observe the unfolding of their relationship. Every thought, every action tells us something new, and when Lena befriends a dying black African (tenderly portrayed by Paul Makgoba), we learn even more. And finally, when they move on, author Athol Fugard, director Thomas Bullard and three rather remarkable actors leave us with much to ponder.

A PARTY WITH BETTY COMDEN & ADOLPH GREEN

at the Morosco

Review by SY SYNA

(A musical revue by Betty Comden and Adolph Green; produced by Arthur Cantor and Leonard Friedman; executed by John Fitzpatrick; gowns by Donald Brooks; piano, Paul Trueblood; cast: Betty Comden and Adolph Green.)

At one point during A PARTY . . . , Betty Comden delivers her formula for a successful revue.

"It's really quite simple," she says. "All you have to do, is think of 25 terrific numbers you can do standing on your feet."

By her standards, their show—made up of anecdotes, skits and songs for which they wrote the lyrics—may fall about 15 numbers short. But both performers have put their years of expertise to work, designing this mildly diverting revue. It is carefully and adroitly tailored: not too personal; always friendly and interesting; ranging from their early lampoons, per-

formed at the Village Vanguard as "The Revuers", down to the little songs of the heart culled from recent Broadway shows (including their best forgotten turkeys).

Neither Comden nor Green have great voices. It hardly matters. There's a relish in hearing talents perform their own material. It gives you an insight into their creative process. In addition, Paul Trueblood is splendid at the onstage grand piano, and Donald Brooks' gowns are lovely.

Comden and Green's lyrics are

pleasant, urbane, mildly witty, often clever, and only occasionally touching. When they teamed up with composers, such as Leonard Bernstein, they came up with memorable hits like "New York, New York". With Julie Styne, they hit their peak in BELLS ARE RINGING (where they worked once again with the late great Judy Holliday, their partner from the Vanguard days). They end their revue with that show's hit song, "The Party's Over." What better way to end a party?

THE CENCI

at the Jean Cocteau Theatre

Review by ED MORAN

(A play by Percy Bysshe Shelley, produced by the Jean Cocteau Repertory Co. directed by Eve Adamson. Set design by Douglas McKeown. costumes and lighting by James S. Payne. Cast: Douglas McKeown, Coral S. Potter, Chip Benjamin, Donna Rowe, Craig Smith, Olivia Virgil Harper, Scott Kanoff, Mitchell Yaven, James S. Payne, Tom Kever, and Chuck Stanley.)

With its themes of incest and parricide, THE CENCI was rarely

performed for the 19th century audience. Even today, it is considered a "closet drama" because its heightened language and sheer length (five hours of nonstop sordidness) do not provide easy satisfaction for the 20th century audience weaned on television.

But Eve Adamson's staging at the Jean Cocteau Repertory is a theatrical success. With the help of a truly skillful cast, she has turned this production of THE CENCI into an eerily fascinating tale of cor-

ruption and moral decay. Incidental organ music and symmetrical sets anchor the production in the period when the renaissance began to sour. And the actors' stances are significant, too: frequently, they assume tableau-like poses that only enhance the studied, methodical evil that runs through the Cenci blood. But the production is not heavy-handed by any means. There are welcome snatches of humor—as through understatement, when Count Cenci dismisses the entire business

as a "dull domestic quarrel."

Coral S. Potter is a statuesque Count Cenci, a frightening figure and always impressive; Donna Rowe plays his daughter, Beatrice, with a suspicion of innocence, though it's always apparent that she too has been corrupted by the star-crossed family; and Olivia Virgil Harper brings a kind of Lady MacBeth quality to her role as Lucretia. It's a fine ensemble in an impressive and playable production.

COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA

at Equity Library Theatre

Review by LEAH D. FRANK

(A play by William Inge, produced by Equity Library Theatre; directed by Ron Troutman; set by Linda Skipper; costumes by Sharon Buchs; lighting by Jeremy Craig Johnson; original music by David Friedman; cast: Allen Fitzpatrick, Elaine Grollman, Nick Harrison, Stan Lachow, Joan Lowell, Dave Okarski, Shelli Place, Edward O'Ross, Mark Weston, and Del Willard.)

COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA

is an old-fashioned, slice-of-life drama which requires a modern audience to suspend logic, common sense, and understanding in order to accept it. ELT's production is a standard one, and Ron Troutman's uninspired direction does little to spark the script or the players. In fact, the direction comes close to making SHEBA sentimental slush, and the added mood music underlying much of the production only serves to heighten its TV soap opera qualities.

The acting is uneven, which is not unusual at this theatre, but in this case some of the blame for the actors' difficulties may be due to Mr. Troutman's unimaginative staging. Nonetheless, veteran actress Joan Lowell gives an honest performance as Lola, the fearful, frustrated housewife. Ms. Lowell's choice to keep the character simple and undramatic is perfect, as it actually heightens the sense of Lola's anguish and loneliness. Elaine Grollman gives a gem of a perfor-

mance fussing around in the minor role of a motherly, albeit nosey, neighbor. Stan Lachow, as the alcoholic Doc, seems unable to come to an understanding of his character's motivations, and Shelli Place is overbearing and awkward in the role of the youthful, self-centered Marie.

Linda Skipper's set design gets a little carried away trying to create the look of middle-Western-lower-class tacky, but her utilization of space serves the production well.

TWO VIEWS

THE CHERRY ORCHARD

at the Vivian Beaumont Theater

Review by ED MORAN

(A play by Anton Chekhov, produced by the New York Shakespeare Festival, directed by Andrei Serban. New English version by Jean-Claude van Itallie. Scenery and costumes by Santo Loquasto; lighting by Jennifer Tipton; incidental music by Elizabeth Swados; dance arranged by Kathryn Posin. Cast: C.K. Alexander, Michael Cristofor, Cathryn Damon, Jon De Vries, William Duff-Griffin, Marybeth Hurt, Raul Julia, Dwight Marfield, Ben Masters, Priscilla Smith, Meryl Streep, George Voskovec, Irene Worth, Max Wright.)

Like it or not, this is an historic production. As the revival of any classic must do, it brings the contemporary audience face to face with a drama written in another time and place and shocks it into recognizing itself. Those who prefer their Chekhov packaged in lavender and sold as "Autumn Mist" might be angered at director Andrei Serban's seeming insouciance. But his freshness and vitality are worth a detour.

As always, Santo Loquasto's sets create a stunning visual impact. They are almost characters themselves, especially in the first and fourth acts. The furniture seems indistinguishable from steles, from monoliths on some bleak Russian

steppe. As the final act begins, a massive white sheet billows over the stage, as though the gathering storm was to be only a blizzard and not a revolution.

Director Serban allows his cast to exploit Chekhov's comic side to the utmost. He dismisses THE CHERRY ORCHARD as a symbol of social change and instead concentrates on the foibles of its characters. Irene Worth, as Madame Ranevskaya, does not evoke the fading Russian aristocracy; instead, she appears as a squawking, somewhat dotty old woman. Her daughter Anya, played by Marybeth Hurt, is quiet, almost demure, but has obviously inherited her mother's blindness. Raul Julia's Lopakhin is characteristically vulgar and parvenu. But the real tour de force is Michael Cristofor's interpretation of Trofimov; his stage presence is always impressive and enjoyable, touched with a restraint that contrasts with the other actors' over-enthusiasm. And one word about Cathryn Damon's Charlotta: Ms. Damon suggests a strange ambiguity of virtue and decadence in one character. She brings an impressive other-worldly tension, this black narcissus blooming on the snows.

THE CHERRY ORCHARD

at the Juilliard Theatre

Review by ED MORAN

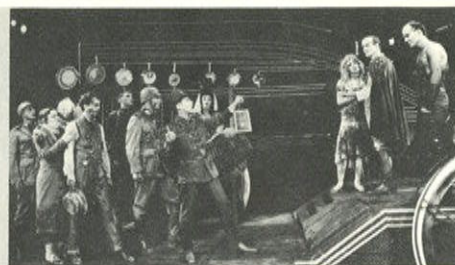
(A play by Anton Chekhov produced by the Juilliard School, directed by Alan Schneider, translation by Ann Dunnigan; settings by Peter Gould, costumes by Kristina Watson; lighting by Joseph Pacitti, choreography by Anna Sokolow. Cast: Harriet Harris, Tom Robbins, Richard Levine, Gilbert Cole, Carla Czeropski, Diane Venora, Suzanne Costellos, Paul Perri, Henry Stram, Lisa McMillan, Alexander Boder, Casey Biggs, Steven Grund, Michael Butler, Robert Lovitz, Dennis Bacigalupi, Lisa Baner, Mitch Litofsky, Maureen Teefy, Steve Bassett, Boyd Gaines and Richard R. Saloman.)

Alan Schneider's production of THE CHERRY ORCHARD is not as ambitious, nor as touted, as the extravaganza put on by neighbors Papp and Serban. But it has a charm and a finesse—and an intimacy—that the nearby Beaumont production lacks.

Productions should not be compared point by point, of course, but it's interesting to note that the Juilliard version seems to stress the "traditional" autumn-like atmosphere that diehards insist is the "only" way to present Chekhov. I am not by any means suggesting that director Schneider is presenting a formula interpretation. What I

am saying is that a nostalgic, romantic, almost dreamy world-view seems to prevail. Mme. Ranevskaya, played by Carla Czeropski, is remarkably youthful; hers is not a faded beauty but a beauty that has never been permitted full flower. Daughter Anya, played by Diana Verona, is only seventeen, yet she seems even more hardened by an oppressive world than is her mother. The same goes for Dennis Bacigalupi's Trofimov—even the most idealistic of students moves as though held down by a pessimism that conceals itself in cherry blossoms. The general sadness of the production is lightened by Richard Levine's Yepikhodovian pratfalls and by Lisa McMillan's impressive performance as Charlotta, the Teutonic governess in pince-nez. Her utter, unmitigated restraint is such a treat.

Peter Gould's setting is also notable. A few twisted cherry branches hang downstage, suspended in space, forming a vestigial proscenium and marking the outer wall of the house. Backstage, the play of lights on vertical ropes creates a most effective orchard—a misty, inchoate mirage of an orchard that underscores this production's quiet scorn.



THE CRAZY LOCOMOTIVE

at the Chelsea Theatre Center

Review by Leah D. Frank

The production of THE CRAZY LOCOMOTIVE, with its speeding train, pipes, dials, smoke, film clips, and marvelous sound effects is spectacular. Unfortunately it was derailed by Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz's silly, dated play and after a while, even the most explosive theatrics become tiresome without purpose or form.

The play begins with a movie of a couple drinking champagne while walking along a railroad track in winter, and it ends with a violent, messy train crash. In between is a late-late movie cliché filled with gangsters, wicked women, and terrified passengers.

The cast relies on a burlesque quality to get them through. They have obviously been directed by Des McAnuff to create overly stylized mannerisms which add little to the enrichment of the event.

The only exceptional aspects of this show are Douglas Schmidt's imaginative set depicting a speeding locomotive engine cab, and Carol Oditz's strikingly super-chic costumes which are recreated, after the crash, as torn, blood stained rags.

But the question here is do the set and costumes carry enough entertainment value to make THE CRAZY LOCOMOTIVE worth catching?

(A play by Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, presented by the Chelsea Theatre Center, translated by Daniel C. Gerould and C.S. Durer, directed by Des McAnuff, set by Douglas Schmidt, costumes by Carol Oditz, lighting by Burl Hash. Cast: Peter Bartlett, Glenn Close, Lee Cotterell, Bob DeFrank, Prudence Wright Holmes, John Jellison, Dennis Lipscomb, Joe Palmieri, Mark C. Peters, Dwight Schultz, John Scoullar, Linda Scoullar, Lin Shaye, Garnett Smith.)



at the Chelsea Theatre/BAM

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

A runaway locomotive rushes down a track towards inevitable doom, while two criminals and a sensual young euphoric woman gleefully wait for the crash and destruction. Lights flash, engines roar, dials whirl, and the train goes faster, forever faster.

It certainly is a CRAZY LOCOMOTIVE—but creatively "crazy". First of all, it is visually so. Douglas Schmidt's set is wonderfully and intricately insane. Complemented by Carol Oditz' precisely stylized costumes and Burl Hash's outstanding lighting, the set effectively combines the distortion of German expressionism with the flair of a Hollywood spectacular.

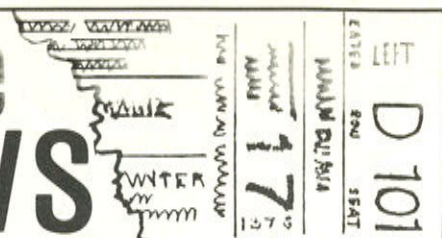
Secondly, it is conceptually "crazy". Director Des McAnuff has molded the cast and special effects to a near-perfect facsimile of anarchy. He makes use of a broad acting style, bold movements and a rhythmic pacing which is almost akin to the rumble of the engine. The entire cast, led with finely-tuned unbounded enthusiasm by Dwight Schultz (arch-criminal Travaillac), Lin Shaye (the sensationalistic young Julia Tomasik), Garnett Smith (aristocratic fiend Prince Karl) and Glenn Close (Karl's passionate wife), leaps exuberantly into this style. And though we laugh, we sense the seriousness underneath the joke. Only at the end of the second act, does the production seesaw in style.

But most of all, it is thematically "crazy"—in the way that only an imaginative free spirit can draw any sense out of the disorientation. In the midst of what seems to be a pointless spoof, 1930's author Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz makes a down-to-earth statement about the dangers of over-mechanization and loss of humanity as society rushes towards inevitable self-destruction through automation.

So, perhaps that locomotive is not so crazy after all.

SMITH/CLOSE/SCHULTZ

Theatre REVIEWS



ASHES

at the Anspacher/Public
Theatre

Review by ED MORAN

(A play by David Rudkin, produced by The N.Y. Shakespeare Festival/Manhattan Theatre Club, directed by Lynne Meadow. Set by John Lee Beatty, lighting by Dennis Porchy, sound by George Hansen and Charles London, costumes by Jennifer Van Meyrhauser. Cast: Penelope Allen, Roberta Maxwell, Brian Murray, John Tilling.)

ASHES is one of those plays, at once harrowing and beautiful, that seems destined to be a modern classic. Lynne Meadow directs the

current production as a poignant and eloquent memory, smooth as a stone in a pool. Once every great while, a play like this comes along to wound and to heal, to shock and to soothe, to question and to attempt reply.

David Rudkin writes of Colin and Anne, an Ulster couple living in England whose single-minded desire is to produce a child. But even a long-suffering devotion, a vivid love, cannot bring new life into Colin and Anne's world. Author Rudkin handles the situation with sensitivity and with a

welcome humor that is explicit but never offensive. Colin tries wearing boxer shorts, tries soaking his privates, wonders whether boyhood homosexuality is the cause. But to no avail. A nurse demonstrates the "proper position" with a plastic penis and vagina—much like a stewardess explaining the oxygen mask. Success—then miscarriage.

It is only in the final scene—when Colin returns from the funeral of a relative killed in a Belfast bombing—that ASHES forces us to consider sterility on the macrocosmic level, too. Just as Colin and

Anne cannot produce a child, an entire society reaps a whirlwind of ashes and violence by permitting its creative wellsprings to dry up. Colin's quiet, terror-stricken description of the horrors in Ulster surely must rank with the most intense of Greek tragedies.

Brian Murray and Roberta Maxwell are not at all sterile as players. They create a marvelously gritty Colin and Anne—vivid and eminently believable. ASHES proves beyond doubt that exciting theatre and top-flight acting has not abandoned us.

SAVAGES

at the Hudson Guild Theatre

Review by LEAH D. FRANK

(A play by Christopher Hampton, produced by the Hudson Guild Theatre and Xingu Productions in association with Center Theatre Group/Mark Taper Forum, directed by Gordon Davidson. Sets and costumes by Sally Jacobs, lighting by John Gleason, cast: Alice Drummond, Stephen Joyce, Joseph Maher, Mandy Patinkin.)

SAVAGES is a philosophical drama about the primitive forces of fear, violence, and fanaticism. It is a self-indulgent political diatribe fragmented with pseudo-chic

Indian folklore, and its structural flaws are inexcusably obvious.

Author Christopher Hampton is searching for significance, but under Gordon Davidson's diffuse direction, the script examines so many viewpoints, it merely succeeds in outlining a series of superficial subplots loosely linked together under an umbrella plot about the kidnapping and assassination of a minor British functionary.

The cliché-rife rhetoric mouthed by the stereotyped characters does nothing to expand on the play's central concern about the

systematic annihilation of South American Indian cultures by the forces of progressive civilization.

When Mr. Hampton lets loose his emotions about the tragic destruction of these tribes, his play shows some promise of genuine theatrical value. But as it is, the Indians (who look like a National Geographic tour of the Museum of Natural History), are not effectively presented. Hampton avoids his own challenge and gets trapped in his cross-cultural clash.

Gordon Davidson renders a mediocre staging of SAVAGES and

fails to build on the inherent strengths in the script. Davidson must also take responsibility for making these capable actors seem like rank amateurs.

Joseph Maher gives an ordinary, stiff-upper-lip characterization of the diplomat who gets shot by a chess-playing Marxist ideologue. Mandy Patinkin looks uncomfortable as an Urban Guerilla, and Stephen Joyce looks worried as the anthropologist.

Sally Jacobs' sets and costumes are superb, but they're not enough to salvage SAVAGES.

PIAF... A REMEMBRANCE

at the Playhouse

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A musical play by David Cohen, conceived by Milli Janz, produced by Michael Ross & Eddie Vallone, directed by Lee Rachman, musical direction by John Marino, sets and lighting by Ralph Alswang, cast: Juliette Koka, Edmund Lyndeck, Lou Bedford, Gregory Salata, Douglas Andros and Donald Hampton.)

Juliette Koka was discovered by

the producers of PIAF...A REMEMBRANCE performing a one-woman show of Piau songs at the Palisidium, a nightclub in New Jersey. Perhaps they should have left things as they were; not necessarily in New Jersey, but as a nightclub evening of Piau.

Ms. Koka is a good performer. She does a better-than-average imitation of Piau. And she has the potential, under some firm coaching, to really reach out into the audience. If the producers' efforts had been directed towards polishing her per-

sensation it might have paid off.

Instead, they have concocted a superficial bit of biographical fluff about Piau. Stiffly directed by Lee Rachman, the show, conceived by Milli Janz and written by David Cohen, is a look-back at Piau's life by three men: Theo Sarapo, her young hairdresser/singer husband, almost adequately played by Gregory Salata; Edmund Lyndeck's credible Louis Leplee, the nightclub owner who discovered Piau; and Marcel Cerdan (a sanguine Lou Bedford), her boxer/lover. Loulou Barrier, her

agent, deftly portrayed by Douglas Andros, also appears.

The first three men perch above the orchestra and narrate Piau's life. Below them, the scenes are sketchily enacted, intermingled with Piau's songs. The orchestra, conducted by John Marino, provides a solid, though not particularly exciting, musical backing. But the staging is awkward; the set, designed by veteran Ralph Alswang, is embarrassing; Robert Troie's costumes are incompletely conceived; while the dialogue resembles an amateur soap opera.

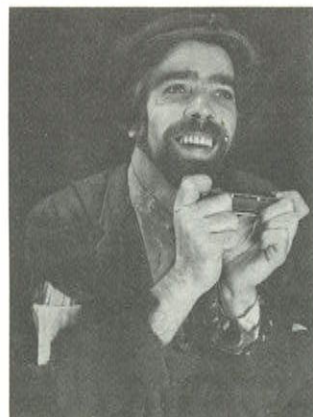
MEMPHIS IS GONE

at St. Clements

Review by LEAH D. FRANK

(A play with music by Richard Hobson, presented by Stephanie Copeland and Peter Henderson, directed by Robert Allan Ackerman, set by Eric Head, lighting by Arden Fingerhut, costumes by Bobby Wejowski. Cast: Kevin O'Connor, John Kellogg, William Snikowski, Jean DeBaer, Thom Schuyler, Robert Paparozzi, Bill Swiggard.)

MEMPHIS IS GONE is a fluff of a musical that gets overly sentimental about the friendship between two hobos named Jasmine and Moon, but it becomes so involved with its own poetry and significance, that it forgets to be a play. There's no build, no tension, no conflict, no motivation, no



KEVIN O'CONNOR

plot, and no development; and Jasmine repeats almost everything Moon says, so the evening is lengthened considerably. Because it's done in flashback, we know from the beginning that Moon is going to die, so we're denied illusion, surprise, and interest.

Richard Hobson wrote both the play and the music, and as shallow as the book is, the music is rich and full, often with a knee-slapping, get-up-and-sing-it-out quality. It's performed by two fine country singers, Thom Schuyler and Bill Swiggard who accompany themselves on guitar, and by a harmonica player who fills out the sound. The music's problems are with di-

rector Robert Allan Ackerman's choice of setting the songs apart from the action, like a living soundtrack overriding the dialogue. It's an unusual effect and its purpose is unclear.

John Kellogg turns in a moving performance as the itinerant Moon, giving the character the necessary mysticism and world-wise weariness; and Jan De Baer is trenchant in her several small roles, especially as a lonely frightened young woman who leaves her puppy, Memphis, with the two hobos. Kevin O'Connor is not believable as the simple-minded Jasmine. His performance is too intelligent and too calculating to fit the character.

MONSTERS

at the Astor Place Theatre

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(Two one-act plays: *SIDE SHOW* by William Dews and *THE TRANSFIGURATION OF BENNO BLIMPIE* by Alberto Innaurato; directed by Robert Drivas; sets and costumes by Ruben De Saavedra; lighting by Ian Calderon. Cast: James Coco, Robert Drivas, Peter Carew, Rosemary DeAngelis, Richard De Fabees, K. McKenna and Roger Serbagi.)

Grand guinol does not get much

STILL LIFE and THE EXPELLED

at the Women's Interart Center

Review by LEAH D. FRANK

(Two one-act plays: *STILL LIFE* by Susan Yankowitz; *THE EXPELLED* by Samuel Beckett; produced by the Women's Interart Center; directed by Rhea Gaisner; set by Christina Weppner; costumes by Susan Tsau; lighting by Patricia Moeser; sound by Philip Corner; cast: Jen Ben-Yakov, Philip Corner, Kathleen Gittel, Jerry Jarrett, Lyn Perez, Ellen Ruskin, Lenore Stein, and Virginia Stevens.)

STILL LIFE, by Susan Yankowitz, is an oddly effective play filled with death images and static scenes, while remaining very much alive. It opens with an old woman savoring each string and crunch of a stalk of celery. Her partner, an old man, vomits his dinner into a pan. The couple move into a bathtub and become a painting on the wall. A man on a pogo stick and a woman in a wheelchair cross paths until they collide. A maid stabs a misbehaving chair which bleeds on the floor. A waiter serves a turkey skeleton on a platter to a manne-

quin and a plaster statue. The statue comes to life, breathes, and announces that there is, still, life.

These scenes, and others, under the competent directorial hand of Rhea Gaisner, flow together smoothly, examining old age and stagnation with humor and sensitivity. There are flaws in Ms. Yankowitz's work—it's too long, and it sometimes seems confused about its purpose. Nonetheless, it is a thoughtful and interesting work, and actress Kathleen Gittel, the plaster statue, is quite remarkable.

The second play, adapted from Beckett's short story, *THE EXPELLED*, is a long monologue with a particularly bitter vision of the world. It is a complex play which is completely beyond the technical and artistic capabilities of actress Lenore Stein. Christina Weppner's abstract set design of broken, half pieces of a building and a carriage hanging from the ceiling creates a surreal container for what should have been a fine production.

CASTAWAYS is one of those shows that isn't even bad enough to arouse indignation. A syrupy new musical, its major problem may have been having too many creative artists involved with the project, with none of them strong enough to guide this ship through the shallows. The story, loosely based on Mordecai Noah's early American play, *SHE WOULD BE A SOLDIER*, concerns a troupe of actors from Philadelphia who,

while on a world tour, are captured by pirates. They are forced to perform for the Chief Pirate, who demands that they make him laugh or he'll kill them. The ultimate critic, the silliness of the plot's intricacies and the ponderous, trite dialogue are not worth detailing.

A fine cast has been assembled for this production, including Kathleen Widdoes, who has a strong, clear singing voice and does credit to Don Pippin's lively score.

performances mesh into a wonderfully endearing whole.

The "La Mama Contraption" is a two-tier wooden structure that requires viewers to sit single file around three sides, like sculpture against a museum wall. Bill Stabile's set, a series of huge platforms in the center, is an astral space that gives the duo plenty of room for serious role-playing. Tom O'Horgan's own haunting instrumental music bridges the scenes well. And Cheryl Thacker's lights are always pleasing, whether as lightning bursts or as a wall of stars.

loathing freakishly fat man who is literally eating himself to death.

Both authors William Dews and Alberto Innaurato demonstrate a wealth of understanding and compassion for their characters. Mr. Dews' siamese twins, portrayed with precision by Richard De Fabees and Robert Drivas, seem to pulsate with their own hatred and needs. Expertly directed by Mr. Drivas, they alternate between performing like wind-up dolls and offering us intimate insights. Their presentation is so cohesive that it's only at second glance that we note

THE SEAGULL

at the Universalist Church

Review by ED MORAN

(A play by Anton Chekhov; produced by Jonathan Weiss; directed and translated by Eugene Leontovich; sets by Kristine Haugan; lights by Gregory Allen Hirsch; costumes by Kristine Haugan. Cast: Catherine Ellis, Lloyd Allan, Jonathan Bolt, Judith Light, Robert Ari, Mary Benson, Cam Kornman, Marshall Borden, Albert Verdesca, James Farkas, Warner Shook, Michael Chin, Suzanne Moran.)

But the actors don't have a chance against the slow pacing, the cluttered staging, the overly dramatic lighting effects, the shoddiness of the costumes, and the cheap, plastic look of the set, designed to be the interior of a ship's hold.

The smoke and stench created every time a pirate shot a rifle had many in the small theatre's audience coughing and choking. But that was, at least, a diversion from the preposterous play on stage.

The two are cast by fate onto a lonely island, and to pass the time, they engage in a familiar human game: role playing. And what games! Of course, each is a facet of the same character, but for the time being, the Emperor and the Architect alternate as mother and son, master and slave, lover and lovee, god and worshipper, et al. Their

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that there is still much left unexplained.

Mr. Innaurato's Benno, a sympathetically pathetic James Coco, suffers the intense pain of an artistic soul imprisoned in a gargantuan body, as he remembers his childhood. At times, unnecessary monologues clutter the action, and occasionally Mr. Coco pushes too hard emotionally. But here again, Mr. Drivas' direction and a fine cast provide the tale with harmonious fluidity, enhanced by Ruben De Saavedra's simple-but-effective sets and costumes.

detriment of many members of the audience who are out of sight and earshot. And not enough attention is paid to mechanicals.

Individual actors deliver their lines well, but they don't seem to be able to create a world for us—and them—to inhabit. A world of provincial Russia, a world where living people eat and talk and itch and have headaches. The intellectual message is there, thanks more to Mr. Chekhov than to Madame Leontovich; but the gut feeling is wanting.

The bright moments are as follows: Mary Benson's always enjoyable levity and geniality as Polina; Marshall Borden's morose, pensive ruminations as Boris Trigorin; Lloyd Allan's boisterous (and boyish) Constantin; and, of course, Judith Light's wistful though anguished interpretation of Nina Zarechnaya. Individual monologues by these actors are often polished and thought-out, but the over-all effect is more that of a series of private readings than a dramatic ensemble.

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JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN

at the Roundabout Stage 1
Review by LEAH D. FRANK

(A play by Henrik Ibsen; presented by the Roundabout Theatre Company; directed by Gene Feist; original score by Philip Campanella. Cast: Gale Sondergaard, Robert Pastene, Jan Farrand, Valerie French, Truman Gage, Jeffrey David Pomerantz, Carolyn Sullivan, Madeline Thomas.)

Written toward the end of Ibsen's life, **JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN** is a rarely performed play, dealing with the tension of approaching death as seen in the harsh focus of personal and professional failure. Two sisters fight over Borkman's love, his fading life, and over the future of his only son, and they both lose.

The problem with this production is that director Gene Feist imposes his viewpoint of the script to the extent that the playwright and the director cease to be a creative unit. When Ibsen is poetic, Feist is prosaic, where Ibsen is surrealistic, Feist is naturalistic, and so forth. They never seem to join forces for this difficult and demanding play.

That the evening is not an artistic failure has to do with the performances of Gale Sondergaard as Borkman's bitter, obsessive wife, and Jan Farrand as her gentle, dying sister. Robert Pastene interprets the role of the whipped, albeit dynamic, disgraced banker Borkman as a rigid, suppressed caricature of a man, an approach which, while not unacceptable, ultimately fails to ignite the necessary interest or sympathy for the character.

Notable about the staging is Feist's attempt to add another dimension to the production by using wind sounds, music, the clang of forging steel, and voice-overs to continually underscore his directorial aims. He handles these effects very well.

The last scene with the two sisters, shadows of what might have been, leaning over the icy figure of the now dead Borkman, is especially moving due to Ms. Sondergaard's and Ms. Farrand's carefully cold under-playing of an emotionally charged moment.

MY LIFE

at the Circle Repertory Theatre

Review by ED MORAN

(A play by Corinne Jucker; produced by the Circle Repertory Co.; directed by Marshall W. Mason. Setting by David Potts; lighting by Dennis Perichy; costumes by Kenneth M. Yount; original music by Norman L. Berman. Cast: Tanya Berezin, Roger Chapman, Jeff Daniels, Jo Henderson, William Hurt, Claire Malis, Christopher Reeve, Nancy Snyder, and Douglass Watson.)

MY LIFE is a portrayal of three generations—not one person as the title implies. And therein lies its undoing. Both playwright and director are so intent on making everyone the central character that a scorecard—not a program—is needed to follow the action. When nine people have their stories to tell over a seventy-year period, things get a bit overwhelming. Edward Howe, thirty-year-old physicist, is ostensibly the person who owns the "my" in the title, but he's more of a passive protagonist than anything else.

It is not always clear if events on stage are taking place in the present in the past, or in memory. Perhaps

this is an intentional effort at timelessness, but it's confusing. And just when some character starts to get halfway interesting, off he or she goes into the swimming pool for ritual cleansing or something. (Yes, there really is a swimming pool, with real water. Someone in the front row almost got drenched when one character took an over-emoted dive.)

Some good acting rescues **MY LIFE**, however. William Hurt is just right for the youthful scientist who wonders why his life isn't going as logically as his theories. Claire Malis is a steadfast Perdita, despite her name, which means "lost one." As if one mother weren't bad enough, Edward Howe has two—the unliberated housewife of the past, and the sophisticated swinger of the present. They are both played enjoyably well by Tanya Berezin and Jo Henderson, respectively.

On the whole, **MY LIFE** relies too much on pat formula and conventional emotions for its own good.

MARCO POLO SINGS A SOLO

at the Newman Theatre

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A play by John Guare, produced by Joseph Papp and the New York Shakespeare Festival; directed by Mel Shapiro; setting by John Wulp; costumes by Theoni V. Aldredge; lighting by Jennifer Tipton. Cast: Larry Bryggman, Joel Grey, Anne Jackson, James Jensen, Madeline Kahn, Shev Rodgers, Chris Sarandon, Sigourney Weaver.)

MARCO POLO SINGS A SOLO is about personal identity. It's about changing. It's about Stony McBride who's making a film about Marco Polo on an iceberg in

1999. It's about Stony's mother, a "hyped up" transsexual who impregnated herself with her own sperm and begat Stony. It's about Stony's unfaithful wife and her lover, a diplomat who just misplaced the cure for cancer.

It's about a lot of things. Some of them silly, some of them meaningful, and most of them entertaining. On one hand, it's a play for the intellectual, the cerebral, who likes subtextual meanings. But on the other hand, it's a play for the science fantasy fan who is out for a good time. It's also too long, too

obvious in some ways, and too obscure in others—all qualities which spring up in Act II.

Director Mel Shapiro allows John Guare's play to demonstrate all that it is, and he has done so in a flashy, gung-ho manner. Stylistically, he unhesitatingly follows the lead of the script, making good use of John Wulp's fascinating set. When the play opens, it's a futuristic drawingroom comedy, formal, stylized and very funny. But as Mr. Guare becomes wordy, the drawingroom style is unfortunately left by the wayside to

make way for enthusiastic anarchy.

The actors have all been guided into outstanding performances. Joel Grey is an exuberant bundle of confusion as Stony; Anne Jackson plays the transsexual with dignified zest; Sigourney Weaver gives a clear interpretation of an astronaut's wife who is impregnated long distance; and Shev Rodgers is bombastic as Stony's father.

John Guare has written a fascinating one-act-plus-epilogue play which he has stretched into two long acts. It's everything it wants to be and more—too much more.

OTHERWISE ENGAGED

at the Plymouth Theatre

Review by ED MORAN

(A play by Simon Gray; produced by James M. Nederlander. Frank Milton and Michael Codron; directed by Harold Pinter; settings by Eileen Diss; costumes by Jane Greenwood; set supervision and lighting by Neil Peter Jampolis; cast: Tom Courtenay, Nicolas Coster, John Horton, John Christopher Jones, Carolyn Lagerfelt, Michael Lombard and Lynn Milgrim.)

Yes, Harold Pinter is directing **OTHERWISE ENGAGED**, but one mustn't therefore assume that the show is a pitiful of dirty linen or pregnant pauses. Oh, pregnancy is mentioned, to be sure. But the problem for Simon Hench, a successful publisher, is that there are not enough pauses in his life, pregnant or otherwise.

OTHERWISE ENGAGED is the story of Simon's being put-upon by everyone he knows on earth—a meddlesome tenant, an unfaithful wife, a highschool chum turned pederast, an insecure brother, a woman writer who insists on going topless in his livingroom. And all

this while, the hapless Hench is trying to spend a quiet afternoon with a Wagner recording.

Tom Courtenay is ideal for the role, since he can so effectively play that anomic individual who can do nothing more than react to things as they happen around—and to—him.

Pinter's restraint is perhaps the saving grace of this production. He wisely keeps the lid on the comedy, avoiding any slapstick, and permitting us to appreciate the delightful, witty dialogue of Simon Gray. The two other characters who seem to enjoy that dialogue most are Davina, the topless siren, played with juicy abandon by Lynn Milgrim; and Wood, the tweedy pederast, played with juiceless abandon by Michael Lombard. Other performances, however, are merely mediocre. By the way, Eileen Diss' skillful living room set is worth noticing.

OTHERWISE ENGAGED is a contemporary drawing-room comedy of English mores and morals, and a most engaging comment on the middle class foibling-around and mucking-up.

GLOWWORM

at the Medicine Show Theatre

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A collectively created work by the company. Alfred de Musset, Carl Morse and Susan Wilkins; produced by the Medicine Show Theatre Ensemble; structured by Barbara Vann; piano, David Nelson; music, Jim Milton; Stephen Foster, Charles Ives and Giuseppe Verdi; costumes by Patricia McGourty; scenic decor by Brozgold; dances by Margot Colbert; lighting by Linnaea Tillett; cast: James Barbosa, Ziska Baum, Chris Brandt, Davidson Lloyd, Jim Milton, Alan Nebelhaus, Barbara Vann, Gretchen Van Ryper.)

The problem with **GLOWWORM** is not that its message is unclear. There are notes in the program; there is a thematic subtitle to the play ("A Vaudeville disclosing false identities, unreal places and uncharted realms of time and space;") and, finally, there is the text itself in which each theme is highlighted several times through a kind of verbal labeling. So, there is no question that it is a comment on the corruption and decadence, on identity, on the fickleness of reality, and on theatrical forms.

Nor is the problem in the play's theatrical style. There is much to be said for the technique of establish-

ing an aura of disorientation and chaos, out of which emerge form and substance. And, indeed, at first it almost seems as if this technique is going to work. When the action starts, we are bombarded with a myriad of seemingly unrelated activities, Patricia McGourty's striking costumes and a host of colors and shapes, while at the same time understanding that there is a story to be told; Lorenzo dei Medici is going to murder his evil cousin.

The problem is that the Medicine Show company, though capable, does not possess the discipline necessary for this concept. They overdo the aura of formlessness, becoming carried away by intriguing-but-unnecessary detours. They overexpose the technique of repetition. And they submit to their own chaos by allowing it to overwhelm the thematic thread.

As performers, the cast is mostly talented; they sing well, move well, and act convincingly. But as collective creators, they need a writer (or editor) with objectivity.

REGIONAL THEATRE REVIEWS

THE SHADOW BOX

at the Long Wharf Theatre

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A play by Michael Cristofer, produced by the Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven, Connecticut; directed by Gordon Davidson; setting by Ming Cho Lee; costumes by Bill Walker; lighting by Ronald Wallace. Cast: Joyce Ebert, Patricia Elliott, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Rose Gregorio, Clifton James, Laurence Luckinbill, Vincent Stewart, Josef Sommer, Mandy Patinkin.)

"They tell you you're dying and you say, 'All right. But if I'm dying, I must still be alive.' " And with this philosophy—spoken by one of the terminally ill patients in Michael Cristofer's *THE SHADOW BOX*—three dying people agree to live out their days with their families in monitored cottages.

There is the confused, plodding Joe, tenderly portrayed by Clifton James. There is Brian, a voluble, multi-faceted Laurence Luckinbill, who suddenly spews forth volumes of writing. And finally, there is Felicity, a determined matriarch, touchingly played by Geraldine Fitzgerald.

In a beautifully composed first act, these people all face their impending deaths with a variety of courage, cowardice and reluctance, each with a different effect on their loved ones. For instance, Joyce Ebert's heart-rending Maggie insists on denying Joe's impending death; while Felicity's daughter, a

PATINKIN/ELLIOTT/LUCKINBILL



compassionate strong-willed Rose Gregorio, dutifully awaits the inevitable release.

Although director Gordon Davidson sometimes creates visual confusion by staging the three families in the same sets, he has enhanced the situations and characters with an extremely viable life by allowing them to develop naturally.

Unfortunately, it flounders in Act II. The thread of action gives way to long exposition, retrospection and dissection. And not even the outstanding Patricia Elliott, guisily perceptive as Brian's ex-wife, can redeem a long-winded argument with his homosexual lover (an indulgently sentimental Mandy Patinkin).

Despite a fine cast, an attractively utilitarian set by Ming Cho Lee and accurately detailed costumes by Bill Walker, *THE SHADOW BOX* lacks an over-all dramatic purpose. Still, a potentially powerful theme is somewhat realized.

AUSTIN PENDLETON



TARTUFFE

at the Hartman Theatre

Review by LEAH D. FRANK

(A play by Moliere, produced by the Hartman Theatre Company, directed by Del Tenney; English verse translation by Richard Wilbur; sets and costumes by Zack Brown; lights by Robert Meeker; music by Barbara Damashek; choreography by Ara Fitzgerald; cast: George Morfogen, Margot Tenney, Eric R. Christianson, Tiina Cartmell, Ed Rice, Theodore Sorel, Carolyn Kava, Austin Pendleton.)

TARTUFFE, Moliere's tongue-in-cheek vision of humanity, has been given an opulent production in Stamford, Connecticut, under the careful, delicate directorial hand of Del Tenney. The characters—absurd, fanatical, and solemn—flow across the stage, carefully building the plot and fleshing out Moliere's skeletal people.

If there is any serious quibbling to be done with Tenney's direction,

it would be with his tendency to overstage—such as when he introduces the long opening servants' dance scene. However, once the play begins, it's smooth good fun all the way.

The acting quality is uneven, with most of the minor roles being filled by obvious newcomers and the major roles being handled by more experienced artists. Austin Pendleton plays the conniving Tartuffe, and although he is effective as the sly, shrill-voiced, and somewhat hysterical Tartuffe, still he is an actor who relies so completely on the technical aspects of his craft that you can actually see him in the process of thinking out his character. It becomes a game to try to guess what trick he'll pull out of his theatrical-technique trunk for each scene.

Zack Brown is credited with the scenic as well as the costume design, and both the set, with its red-gold tapestry, marble stairway luxury, and the costumes, with their ruffles and flounces, are a pleasure to look at.

This version of Richard Wilbur's English verse translation is as charming an evening of Moliere as one can currently find in the tri-state area.

GEMINI

at the Performing Arts Foundation

Review by LEAH D. FRANK

(A play by Albert Innaurato; presented by PAF Playhouse, Huntington, Long Island; directed by Peter Mark Schifter; sets by Christopher Nowak; costumes by Ernest Allen Smith; lights by Larry Crimmins. Cast: Danny Aiello, Reed Birney, Anne De Salvo, Jonathan Hadary, Jessica James, Robert Picardo, Carol Potter.)

When Albert Innaurato was growing up, he must have had both ears open, his eyes ready to photograph everything around him, and his brain set in the record mode. He's playing back his early input in *GEMINI*, and in the process of unraveling this black comedy, he's savagely defending every kid who had it tough—every acned misfit, every suffering teenager with a sexual identity crisis, and every sensitive child who was intellectually and emotionally abused by family and environment.

Francis Geminiani is a student home from Harvard, who can't decide if he loves his girlfriend or her brother. During the course of the play he grows up, helped by a loving but uncommunicative father, a foul-mouthed neighbor and her fat genius son, and his father's neurotic but practical woman friend. Innaurato bitterly and often viciously slashes through his characters' layers of pretension and ex-

poses some very real and surprisingly likable people.

Although the play needs structural tightening, its irreverent comic viewpoint holds its hysterically-funny own on stage. Director Peter Mark Schifter has cogently moulded Innaurato's action, and the cast, lead by Robert Picardo as the confused young man, Danny Aiello as his uncomprehending father, and Jonathan Hadary as the obese neighbor boy, is remarkably good.

Set designer Christopher Nowak has caught and re-created the ambience of a South Philly Italian slum backyard, and Larry Crimmins' effective lighting design aids the production admirably.

Innaurato reminds us that it's painful to be young and to suffer so terribly over such unimportant things—and that it's also funny.



POTTER/PICARDO

COUNTING THE WAYS / LISTENING

at the Hartford Stage Company

Review by Debbi Wasserman

(Two one-act plays by Edward Albee, produced by the Hartford Stage Co.; directed by Edward Albee; set design by David Jenkins; costumes by Robert Mackintosh; lighting by John McLain; cast: Maureen Anderman, Angela Lansbury and William Prince.)

In his two new one-acts, Edward Albee proves to be as talented and insightful as ever. Unfortunately, he also proves to be theatrically pretentious.

COUNTING THE WAYS, subtitled *A VAUDEVILLE*, is a fluffy collection of pseudo-symbolic dialogue. In a polished production, a perky Angela Lansbury and an impish William Prince, sit, stand, and arrange themselves about two chairs, a table and several walls, while they count—or certify—the ways that they love each other.



PRINCE/LANSBURY/ANDERMAN

Meanwhile, artificially imposed blackouts interrupt their dialogue in order to squeeze 'punch lines' out of the anticlimactic speeches. It's hardly vaudeville, with too much symbolism for pure entertainment and too little substance for a meaningful experience.

LISTENING achieves more meaning, but no more success. We are now on the grounds of an asylum, amidst stone walls and an unused, ornate fountain, excellently designed by David Jenkins. A world-weary woman, leading a girl patient, enters to meet her waiting, one-time paramour: the asylum's cheerfully romantic cook (a poetic Mr. Prince).

Perceptively directed by Mr. Albee and intensely portrayed by Maureen Anderman, the girl is the focus of the action. Albee almost seduces us into caring about her psychosis, the workings of her mind, and her relationship with the woman (a credible Ms. Lansbury). Yet, he never allows us to go beyond the surface. He clutters up the girl's story with sophomoric, irrelevant sexual innuendoes, and with unimaginative symbolism.

Albee evidently has much to tell us in *LISTENING*. But he seems unwilling to really develop and reveal his true theme.

REGIONAL THEATRE REVIEWS

THE VIETNAMIZATION OF NEW JERSEY

at the Yale Repertory Theatre

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A play by Christopher Durang, produced by the Yale Repertory Theatre, New Haven, Ct., directed by Walt Jones; scenery by Christopher Phelps Clarens; costumes by Kathleen M. Armstrong; lighting by James H. Cage. Cast: Kate McGregor-Stewart, Charles Levin, Stephen Rowe, Ben Halley, Jr., Richard Bey, Anne Louise Hoffman, and Jeremy Geidt.)

There once was a Typical American Family: Mother Ozzie Ann who worried about table manners; Father Harry who worried about money; Younger Brother Et who made everyone worry about him; and Maid Hazel who recited bicentennial minutes. One day, Big Brother David came home from Vietnam with his new wife, Liat—both blind.

Is this beginning to sound familiar? The similarity between THE VIETNAMIZATION OF NEW JERSEY and David Rabe's STICKS AND BONES is obviously

no accident. Author Christopher Durang has taken Rabe's already sarcastic play, has exaggerated it and has turned out his own blackly humorous comments on human atrocities.

And it almost works. In the first act, director Walt Jones and Durang have blended their talents to create an expressionistic impression of premeditated insanity. The actors respond well to it. For instance, Kate McGregor-Stewart (Ozzie Ann) flits across the stage artistically; Ben Halley, Jr.'s Hazel is a poker-faced joke; and Jeremy Geidt (Father McGuillicutty) presents a perfect caricature.

But the thin line between ludicrousness and planned theatrical absurdity is a tightrope. And in the second act, the production loses its balance. Though the cleverly designed scenery and properly stereotyped costumes remain consistently good, the content suffers from overemphasis. Writing and direction lose their sense of humor and overkill the play's message.

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

at the Hartman Theatre

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A play by Arthur Miller, produced by the Hartman Theatre Company, Stamford, Ct., directed by Del Tenney; sets by Robert Verberkmoes; costumes by Gerda Proctor; lighting by John McLain. Cast: Mike Kellin, Carol Teitel, Ralph Byers, Theodore Sorel, Stephen Berenson, Margot Tenney, Alfred Hinckley, Earle Hyman, Gary F. Martin, Susan Smith, Henson Keys, Tina Cartmell and Robin Reif.)

Like Willy Loman, this production exists on a simple level. Always likeable, never offensive, it floats its dialogue easily. It's honest; it's even sometimes moving; it shines with a careful polish. But it never takes a stand on the issue of Willy's life.

This does not mean that director Del Tenney has done a bad job of assembling this DEATH OF A SALESMAN. On the contrary, his fluid staging handles the transitions from reality to fantasy quite effectively; the show is paced well; and the actors all relate to each other with apparent sincerity. In addition, the sets, costumes and lighting all

give the play an appropriate look.

However, Mr. Tenney has not focused the production. He has, instead, allowed the strength of each actor to dominate the roles. For instance, because Theodore Sorel obviously has a very firm point of view about Biff, and because he portrays it with emphasis, the theme shifts to him entirely. And whereas Mike Kellin is sympathetic and warmly credible as Willy, he lacks the intensity of Willy's desperation. So we are saddened by his problems, but we do not cry for him or for what he represents. The same holds true of Carol Teitel's amiable-but-overly-restrained Linda. And although Alfred Hinckley is an empathetic Charlie, Stephen Berenson's almost "camp" effeminate Bernard, and Ralph Byers' overly affected Happy, cannot be ignored.

Just as Willy never finds himself, this DEATH OF A SALESMAN flounders for its own identity. So, we are left with vague memories of a lost soul and the son whose life he redeemed by dying.

DINNER THEATRE REVIEWS

NEVER TOO LATE

at the Fox Hollow Dinner Theatre

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A comedy by Sumner Arthur Long, produced by Gamell Productions; directed by James Peacock; scenic design by James French; cast: Mimi Bensing, Ed Herlihy, Bob Horen, Stewart Lane, Evelyn Page, and Rebecca Ann Seay.)

On a superficial level, director James Peacock's production of

NEVER TOO LATE, works. The acting is competent, the staging is polished, the action moves swiftly, James French's set is attractive, and many lines are funny. But when examined seriously, the show falls into the trap of under-estimating its material, and catering to a too easily pleased L.I. dinner theatre audience.

Granted, Sumner Arthur Long's comedy about middle-aged pregnancy is essentially a silly bill of fare with stereotyped characters and situations. But it does have its intelli-



Theatre Record Reviews

THE BAKER'S WIFE

Review by NORMAN L. BERMAN

(Music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz; original orchestrations by Thomas Pierson and Don Walker; incidental music by Daniel Troob; arranged for records by Stephen Schwartz and Robert Billig; conducted by Robert Billig. Cast: Paul Sorvino, Patti Lupone, Kurt Peterson, Teri Ralston. Released by TAKE HOME TUNES.)

A great deal of anticipation and curiosity developed in New York concerning the arrival of the Stephen Schwartz/Joseph Stein musical, THE BAKER'S WIFE. Like countless other musicals, this one was reported to be having a great deal of "on the road turbulence". Unfortunately, the show never reached New York. However, for those people interested in hearing the Schwartz score, TAKE HOME TUNES has produced a fine original cast album.

As in the past, Schwartz demon-

strates with this show that his greatest strength lies in his melodies. The score, for the most part, has some very humable, pleasurable tunes. They are richly enhanced by the "original" orchestrations by Thomas Pierson and Don Walker.

The songs have a mixture of that traditional French cabaret style and a big romantic pop sound. Paul Sorvino makes an impressive musical debut, singing in his big tenor voice, "Any-Day-Now-Day" and "Gifts Of Love" (the show's big ballad, sung in duet with Patti Lupone). Kurt Peterson gives quite a fine performance singing the patter/bolero song, "Proud Lady".

The Schwartz score is neither challenging, investigative, nor unusually creative. It is indeed most entertaining, and greatly strengthened by excellent performances and big beautiful orchestrations.

IPI TOMBI

Review by CURT DAVIS

(All music by Bertha Egnos; lyrics by Gail Lakier; record produced by Billy Forest & Lofly Schultz; arranged by Lofly Schultz. A Sattel Recording on ASH-TREE Records.)

Those who saw the tribal South African musical, IPI-TOMBI, on Broadway remember—whether pleasantly or not—its high kicks and jumps that Donna McKechnie's musical mirror can't even reflect, and its cultural traditions immersed in its music in much the way Tevye's fiddler orchestrates those lives. Conceiver-producer-director Bertha Egnos took credit for all the music, including the traditional songs. But boycotts because the show was a South African product by Whites about Blacks closed it after a few weeks. Now all that's left for theatre-goers is visual memories and a two-record original cast album on the British label Galaxy Records.

For those who did not see the play, IPI-TOMBI as an album means much less. The story of one

member of the Xhosa tribe looking for—but failing to find—fame and fortune in a big mining town, emerges as even skimpier than on stage. The numbers are alternately in African dialect and in English, making it necessary to judge each song individually rather than weaving them into a structured, "musical-comedy" whole. Two ballads, "Nadia" and "The Digger", are beautiful odes to a wife and to a wandering Black's search for personal roots. A mother's prayer for God to help her feed her children comes across. On the other, slickly commercial hand, is a number called "Baby, Baby", with lyrics that even ROCKABYE HAMLET wouldn't have deigned to include. Most of the rhythms, drumbeats, and raw vocal power is there, but the two show-stoppers—dancers in boots, and with empty Coke cans—are not.

This album has plenty to recommend it and has enough exciting music to justify many spins, but I'm just glad that I saw the show, too.

gent moments, and it's up to the production to bring the play up to those moments. Yet, despite a talented cast, Mr. Peacock's version plays down to the lowest levels of the material. His direction seems to fear a lost laugh, a quiet moment, or a serious reflection. And basically serious scenes have been turned into shallow visual jokes.

As for the cast, their characterizations are all basically sound, but their performances have become almost slapstick. Evelyn Page's newly

pregnant Edith is particularly guilty of this indulgence; she shuffles and mugs like a take-off on Edith Bunker. As her husband, Harry, Ed Herlihy does far better, holding more to credibility; but even he has his share of self-indulgence. Only Mimi Bensing escapes the farcical atmosphere in her few rational appearances as best-friend Grace.

NEVER TOO LATE is a lot of fun. But it's unfortunate that the production does not have more faith in itself.

DINNER THEATRE REVIEWS

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

at An Evening Dinner Theatre

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A musical comedy with book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, produced by Bob Funking and Bill Stutler, directed and choreographed by Randal Hoey, musical direction by Jim Coleman; sets and costumes by Michael Bottari and Ronald Case; lighting by Raymond Dooley. Cast: Suellen Estey, John High, Clint Clifford, Marsha Bagwell, Suzi Bolen, Donalyn Petrucci and Michael C. Booker.)

With some impressive voices, complete costumes and a well-paced production, director Randal Hoey creates a sense of polish in his version of *THE SOUND OF*

MUSIC. But take care not to look too carefully, or the veneer will crack.

Before we look at the flaws, however, we should note the strengths which help allay the surface cracking during much of the production. For instance, there is Suellen Estey, an asset to any production, but all the more so here, because she is Maria. Ms. Estey has a tuneful voice and an amiable personality that combine well with her inner vitality. And, except for some few moments of "preciousness", she is quite credible. Then there are the "Nuns"—Hedi Klebl, Frances

Roth, Elaine Bunse, Suzi Bolen, and especially Marsha Bagwell as the Mother Abbess. Their choral singing would make any choir proud. John High has a pleasant sincere manner as Max. And the visual effect, created by Michael Bottari and Ronald Case, is thorough.

You don't have to look too far, however, before the production's problems show through. John Eppler, albeit an understudy, is sadly miscast as Captain Von Trapp, visually, vocally and emotionally. The children, too, are weak; their singing, especially, is only passable, a serious difficulty,

considering that the story is about the Trapp Family Singers.

Finally, there is Randal Hoey's tentative staging and choreography. Although he has the right idea in trying to involve the entire many-tiered theatre in his staging, he does not go far enough with that concept. And despite the fact that he places the actors neatly onstage, the choreography is unimaginative and fails to take the performers' abilities into account.

As a production, this version of *THE SOUND OF MUSIC* is somewhat incomplete, for without a solid base, the polish is only transparent.

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

at the Northstage Theatre

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(A musical with book by Joseph Stein, music by Jerry Bock, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, produced by Northstage Theatre Restaurant, Norman Main, Michael Vogel, directed by Arnold Spector, original choreography reproduced by Robert Pagant, musical director, Alyce St. Clair Billington; set and lights by Michael J. Hotopp & Paul de Pas; costume consultant, Guy Geoly; cast: Norman Atkins, Dolores Wilson, Honey Sanders, Fyvush Finkel, Barbara Cowley, Gail Malmuth, Ginny Reinas, Daniel Levoff, Bjarne Buchtrup, Gary Holcombe.)

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

possesses the inherent charm and significance of a universal parable, and its theme and music will probably never be out of date.

Director Arnold Spector has given the play just the kind of straightforward treatment needed to bring out these qualities. And although his production sometimes falters, the result is a moving portrayal. Mr. Spector's staging is effectively simple—drawing considerably upon Jerome Robbins' original staging, but making adjustments for this set (appropriately designed by Michael J. Hotopp and Paul de

Pas). He keeps the action moving, transitioning easily into Robert Pagant's impressive re-creation of Robbins' original choreography. Only a few times, does his pacing falter or does he fail to highlight an emotional moment.

For the most part he has handled the actors well, allowing the humor to come across without effort. As Tevya, opera singer Norman Atkins is warmly believable—tired, loving, romantic-yet-practical. And the other actors respond well to him, especially Dolores Wilson's low keyed Golde, Fyvush Finkel's

formidable Lazar Wolf, Gail Malmuth's tender Hodel and Gary Holcombe's convincing Perchik.

Many others are well played, but not all. Daniel Levoff, for instance, performs his Motel too broadly. Honey Sanders' Yente is too like a suburban American housewife. And some chorus members seem ill at ease.

Yet, this is where *FIDDLER*'s strength comes in. With good principals and essentially cohesive direction, the story of Anatevka surpasses the weaknesses of its production.

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THEATRE REVIEWS

CHILDREN'S



THREE TALES AT A TIME

at the Hotel Opera

Review by DEBBI WASSERMAN

(Three tales: "Dark Cloud" book by Candace Crisman, music by Judie Thomas, lyrics by Denny Douglas and Judie Thomas, directed by Audrey

Appleby and Candace Crisman; "Land Turtle and Leopard" book by Meridee Stein, music by Jala-uddin Kalvert Nelson, directed by Stephanie Silverman; and "The Magic Mill" book by Matthew Kaplowitz, music by Judie Thomas, lyrics by Susan Dias, Denny Douglas and Judie Thomas, directed by Meridee Stein; produced by the First All Children's Theatre Company, costumes by Cheryl Blalock, scenery by Kathy Kunkel and Denise Weber, musical direction by Paula Bing, lighting by Charles Willmott, cast: The Meri Mini Players.)

The First All Children's Theatre Company presents some of the best musical theatre around. Producer/founder Meridee Stein has done more than assemble dozens of non-professional children into a professional-looking cast. She has built a company which demonstrates some of the highest theatrical standards.

Everything about their current production meshes together beautifully. Their intimate theatre provides a comfortable setting for a finely designed stage-in-the-round. Kathy Kunkel and Denise Weber, who designed the scenery, have then

enhanced the stage platforms with a bevy of geometrical movable set pieces. The tales themselves are all concise, well-written original fables, sparked with tuneful rhythmic songs and tied together by a clown and a child.

Each tale has a different director, yet there is a consistency of quality throughout. Every character, whether a lead or non-speaking role, has been carefully conceived. The in-the-round staging has been handled extremely well. And in only two places are lines lost: when three constantly moving characters speak the theme of the first play in unison; and in the second, when some "animal" mouths are covered by their masks.

Incidentally, Cheryl Blalock's costumes are marvelously comprehensive, and musical director Paula Bing creates an outstanding harmonious sound.

Because of its thematic nature, **THREE TALES...** is labeled a "children's show." But it is a pleasure to see a company which uses that labeling as a reason for high quality and not an excuse.

GRANDPA

at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA

Review by SY SYNA

(A children's entertainment by Judith Martin with music by Donald Ashwander, produced by the Paper Bag Players; directed and designed by Judith Martin; lighting by Robby Monk, cast: Irving Burton, Judith Martin, Jeanne Michels and Virgil Roberson.)

The Paper Bag Players have been

creating children's theatre since 1958. They are a far cut above most children's theatre companies working now. But they are a considerable cut below their early days.

They've boiled their shows down to a formula: a series of small skits and bits tied together by a general theme, and flavored with Donald Ashwander's bouncy electronic harpsichord music. Vanished is the music scored for Chinese blocks, gongs, whistles, bottles. Ashwander's music is lively, propulsive,

The few songs they get the audience to sing are simple, catchy. The company still uses cardboard cartons and paper bags for sets, props and costumes, but it now has the air of a trademark gimmick rather than imaginative innovation. The acting is overdone throughout, in a pseudo-bright style that's endemic in most children's theatre.

The theme of **GRANDPA** is "getting older". Judith Martin, founder, writer, director, designer and actor is most clever. Her skits

usually work off some reality: newborns react differently to going home; mother-child injustices are dealt with in a skit, "It's Just Not Fair"; as a daughter grows older and taller, her relationship to her father changes. But several skits are pointless, just quick change-of-pace numbers, or routines that go nowhere. The most innovative skit, "Stolen Sneakers", features settings drawn on the spot.

The rest of the show is old hat made out of a paper bag.

CINDERELLA and THE WIZARD OF OZ

at The Cubiculo

Review by SY SYNA

(Plays by Stephen Hotchner, produced by On Stage Children, directed by Lee Frank, music by Judy Kurzer, WIZARD lighting by June Sobel and Amy Samuelson, CINDERELLA lighting by Michael McConkey, settings by Larry Gumpel, percussion by Peter Bass, Cast: Kimberly Cole, Joanna Shedlova, Denise Stephens, Hollis Winick, Amy Samuelson, George Ayer, June Sobel, Jay Siegel, Michael McConkey and Dinah Carlson.)

It is the notion of this company that the children in the audience must be involved at key moments in the drama. A child hides Cinderella's slipper. Others help her clean house and brush her hair. They tip-off the prince that Cinderella is being held prisoner. Well and good.

But they are also told *they* are the Wizard of Oz, because their belief in things has wizardry in it. Thus the children are robbed of an actual wizard on stage.

This approach also slows down the action. Both plays grind to a halt while the children dither about on the stage. When the Wicked Witch of the West darts about the theatre, gibbering and shrieking from various perches, the children, for the most part, are lost as to what's happening.

Cinderella is a much tighter show. Director Lee Frank works a lot with improvisations, and her cast is relaxed and easy with the children. Kimberly Cole is the epitome of fairy-tale heroines. Hollis Winick and Denise Stephens, most attractive actresses, try hard to play the ugly stepsisters. But Ms. Stephens sounds fresh off the boat from England, Ms. Winick right up from the subway.

The atmosphere of both these shows is more of a party than a play. Technicals such as costumes, props, lighting and sets are makeshift and perfunctory. There is much warmth and good will, but little art.

DON'T CRY, CHILD, YOUR FATHER'S IN AMERICA

at the Henry Street Settlement

Review by SY SYNA

(A play by Herb Schapiro, adapted from "A Bintel Brief: 60 Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward," by Isaac Metzger, music by Charlie Morrow, lyrics by Herb Schapiro, produced by the Labor Theatre, directed by C.R. Portz; choreography by Carol Culver, costumes by Louise Martinez; sets by Sandi Marks; projections by Peter Smallman; cast: Hope Arthur, Enid Blymore, Michael Champagne, Jonathan Cobert, Roy Doliner, Leslie Feagan, Nina Karp, Phil Levy, William G. Schilling and Ingrid Sonnenchen.)

Aside from its opening sequence of photographs in agit-prop style, ranging from 1900's Poland to the Lower East Side, **DON'T CRY, CHILD...** is a tiresome show.

Absolutely nothing happens. The curse lies both with the original material and the adaptation. Isaac Metzger's thesis in the original book, is that the letters, viewed over the years, reflect a sort of social history. Perhaps so. But that doesn't make them theatre. Herb Schapiro's adaptation, doesn't even

give us the luxury of skits with a beginning, middle and end. And only a brief scene between Hope Arthur and Nina Karp as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, works.

As it exists, it is a vaudeville sketch in the style of Weber and Fields, heavy with Yiddish dialect, pointless and not funny. For instance, a Ned Harrigan style song and dance number features a Jew with an Irish last name, who is in the pork business. The show is tastelessly executed, for which director C.R. Portz must share the blame with "choreographer" Carol Culver. The songs, by Charlie Morrow with lyrics by Herb Schapiro, add little.

Some of the technical aspects of the production are a little more successful, individually, than the production as a whole. Louise Martinez' costumes effectively mirror the changing times. Sandi Marks' evocative multi-purpose setting catches, at times, the feel of a Lower East Side street. And Peter Smallman's projections are the most dramatic part of the show.

NEW YORK THEATRE NOSTALGIA

HISTORIC THEATRICAL SITES

by EMORY LEWIS

(Drama Critic, Bergen Record)

New York is a living museum of the stage. Our dramatic heritage is everywhere around us. Try a walking tour. Start at the Battery, that salty tip where the island dips into the bay. Here is the restored outer shell of Castle Garden, the leading amusement hall of an earlier New York.

An historical plaque near 17 John Street notes that the first comedy by a native-born dramatist—Royall Tyler's "The Contrast"—was performed at the John Street Theatre on April 16, 1787. George Washington, while President, was a frequent patron of that playhouse.

Discover Theatre Alley, the Shubert Alley of the early 19th century. This little-known thoroughfare, now dark and dirty, is a narrow lane connecting Ann and Beekman Streets. It was once lined with the stage door entrances for several showcases, including the Park Theatre. That neo-classic gem was built in 1798 by a group of wealthy theatregoers, headed by John Jacob Astor. It was destroyed by fire in 1848. Here such stars as Fanny Kemble and Edmund Kean emoted. It

was the center of the bustling, glittering theatre district. Everybody dined at Windust's, the Sardi's of its day.

Move north and by all means pause a moment at Astor Place. Here stood the long-since-departed Astor Place Opera House, which in 1849 became a battleground between the admirers of two great Shakespearean tragedians (the American Edwin Forrest and the Englishman William Charles Macready). The casualty list of that riot (23 dead and many more injured), bespeaks the zeal of those most fervent fans.

Continue to 16 Gramercy Square. This handsome town house was once the home of Edwin Booth, the most popular actor the New York theatre ever nurtured. Here he founded the prestigious Players Club in 1888. Telephone your request to visit the elegant rooms and the excellent theatre collection of books, paintings, and memorabilia. Peer through the iron fence around Gramercy Park at the fine statue of Edwin Booth as Hamlet.

Now proceed to 1 East 29th Street, just off Fifth Avenue. In a garden setting, the Church of the Transfiguration is a lovely example of "Cottage Gothic". Since the 1870's, the church has been favored by the

theatrical profession. According to legend, the pastor of a fashionable church nearby refused to conduct funeral services for a mere actor and suggested that the mourning mummers try "the little church around the corner". The phrase stuck. Edwin Booth was buried from this church, and a shimmering memorial window shows him in his favorite role of Hamlet. Note, too, the striking stained-glass window depicting Joseph Jefferson in scenes from "Rip Van Winkle".

Everybody is familiar with the statue of George M. Cohan in Duffy Square. Less known are the figures over the display windows on the northeast corner of 7th Avenue and 46th Street. Proudly nestled in gold-leaf niches, the four stars were unveiled by Mayor Jimmy Walker in 1929. Marilyn Miller is festive in her clownsuit from "Sunny", Ethel Barrymore is an imperious Ophelia. Rosa Ponselle sings an aria from "Norma", Mary Pickford and her puppy are depicted in "Little Lord Fauntleroy".

Manhattan is a maze of theatre history. Farther north, tucked away between 94th and 95th Streets and bounded by Broadway and West End Avenue is a startlingly suburban double row of English cottages. These 27 cottages, with gardens and a pretty little pedestrian path running down the center, were built in 1921 and called Pomander Walk. It is the only lane in New York City named for a Broadway play. It was inspired by a stage setting for POMANDER WALK, a 1911 hit both on Broadway and in London's West End. Originally, the Walk was intended for and first occupied by theatre people, and early tenants included Nancy Carroll, Louis Wolheim, critic Ward Morehouse, and Madeleine Carroll.



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Theatrical Restaurants & Establishments

At the Algonquin...

by ANDREW ANSPACH
(The Algonquin)

Why is it so much more exciting to see Ingrid Bergman dining nearby in your restaurant, than to watch her making love on a TV or movie screen? The answer is the same as why people are increasingly going to the theatre. They prefer the reality of a live appearance, witnessing what celebrated performers are like in person.

The Algonquin cook book, *Feeding the Lions*, makes this same point. It observes that most people are keenly interested in the realities of celebrity's lives, including what they really look like and what they eat in restaurants. The public expects glamorous personages will order exotic dishes, while dropping hilarious quips and scintillating bon mots.

But there are disappointments in store. The celebrated frequently munch fare as banal as chili and oatmeal. Examples abound at the Algonquin. Yves Montand, in lieu of more continental cuisine, favors hot pastrami on rye. Lord Laurence Olivier has a penchant for peppermint ice cream. When not "Stompin' at the Savoy," Ella Fitzgerald savors scrod at the Algonquin.

Even more surprising, celebrities (aside from recognizable actors and such) often attract little or no attention in a vibrant restaurant full of animated people. After theatre in our Rose Room recently, even Henry Kissinger arrived and departed unobserved by anyone except his secret service men. Yet, simultaneously, many in the room were confidently identifying a strikingly beautiful young lady and her distinguished escort—probably a Princeton coed in town for a good meal with her father.

But whether that dazzler is Ellen Burstyn, a Princeton coed or a Greenwich housewife, and whether she orders scrambled eggs or Entrecote de Boeuf au Poive, she's part of the restaurant's scintillating, articulate, live cast. That live cast is what exciting restaurants have in common with the theatre. And, as most of the world becomes increasingly plastic and mechanized, that really live presence bodes most encouragingly for our shared bright future.

(Of course, in a restaurant, superb edibles and potables also help . . . greatly!).

THEATRE BOOKS

REVIEWS COMMENTS

SEEMING, BEING, AND BECOMING Acting In Our Century

by Robert L. Benedetti
(Drama Book Specialists, \$6.95)

Review by ALICE SPIVAK

As a teacher of acting, I approach any acting book with skepticism. Due to my long and reverent involvement with the acting process, I am wary of written description and ready to do battle with "methods", "formulas" or opinions.

Robert Benedetti's book tries dedicatedly to relate to the *need* actors fulfill, from ancient times up to and focusing on this century, with concise essays on Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Vakhtangov and Brecht, Artaud, Grotowski, and the Living Theatre, including many enlightening references to Aristotle, Zola, Peter Brook, and Joseph Chaikin (to whom the book is inscribed), among others. The final portion of the book is made up of personal homilies, renderings, and a collection of informative quotes about the actor, his environment, and his art. He ends up promoting "becoming" as the future of all acting styles, as opposed to "seeming" and "being".

I do not share Mr. Benedetti's optimism and admiration for the "theatre of confrontation" and a breaking down of role-playing. But I do find his point of view and his literary choices sometimes inspiring and revelatory about the acting experience itself. And I bemoan, with him, the plight of the actor today: prejudice, isolation and the miserable non-productive periods of

looking for work. ("If actors were deer, we would have to shoot most of the herd.")

Benedetti is ready to bury "realism" in acting, and embrace the various new forms that have become fashionable recently, such as those influenced by Grotowski and Peter Brook—while searching for a newer form yet! He also confuses "realism" with "naturalism". Certainly "naturalism" is as phony as the old-fashioned histrionics of silent movie days. As for me, "realism" is still in its infancy. The excitement which occurs in a deeply drawn character's emotional response to the time, place and situation of the play, and the cathartic experience the audience can have through the actor's subjective reality, is too new and too rare in our theatre to dismiss it yet. Why "confront" the audience or "ignore" them as so many of these stylistic theatres do, when we can simply "invite" them to "share" with us something spiritual, educational and uplifting? For actors, the search should be *within*, not *without*—content, not form.

Therefore I agree with Mr. Benedetti that finally it is *Stanislavski* who remains the most compelling force toward establishing a dignified theatre; his objectives were universal, and his "system", we must always remind ourselves, was discovered from life, not invented in his head. I do not agree with Benedetti that we should look beyond him yet.

This book is well-written, and can be a good source book for students of acting, albeit a highly personal one.

Ms. Spivak is an actress, teacher, coach, and director in New York City.

BETTER FOOT FORWARD

by Ethan Mordden
(Viking Press, \$15)

Review by ED GREENBERG

Publishers and editors frequently deserve even worse reviews than their authors. Take Ethan Mordden's youthfully exuberant accumulation of title-droppings, *BETTER FOOT FORWARD*, subtitled "The History of America's Musical Theatre". The front flap modestly states "... also probably the best—it is undoubtedly the most entertaining—such history ever published. . . . a rare thing: a book at once invaluable for reference, imperative for a comprehensive understanding of its subject." I'm afraid the author has done in his publisher by not reading the dust jacket.

In an introduction, probably written after the book was edited, the author, quite ingenuously anticipates our expectations and lets us know we are *not* to expect practical information: "... I have avoided the usual cast listings and chatter about personalities. Such credits can be found else-

where, they add little to an understanding of our musical theatre as an art form, and they're boring to read anyway." One wonders if Mr. Mordden was bored in researching for his book, or if he didn't bother . . .

Nor are we to expect the personal touch. "How, asks the reader, can someone still in his twenties talk about 'sumptuous scenery' or 'inferior musical direction' circa 1920? . . . material is mainly what counts . . . sheet music, complete scores, published librettos, and private scripts. . . . The only thing I didn't do was talk to anybody who was involved . . . this book does not emphasize the human side of musical comedy production . . . as much as the hard realities of music, lyrics, and script."

An interesting approach, writing about live theatre with minimal concern for its practitioners!

Unfortunately, the author's "... hard realities of music, lyrics, and script" are not well served by the actuality of the book. Few of the musicals mentioned are either analyzed or even summarized as to

(continued on page 50)

Theatrical Restaurants & Establishments

by **VINCENT SARDI**
(Sardi's Restaurant)

Since I obviously know too much about our faults and, hopefully, good qualities, I would prefer to discuss a restaurant other than my own.

Recently I visited a delightful restaurant, Le Lavandou (134 East 61st Street). This charming, small French restaurant is right up there with the best in New York. However, its prices are surprisingly moderate. The decor is typically French—cheerful, light, unpretentious—no gimmicks, and with beautiful fresh flowers.

At lunchtime, when I visited Le Lavandou, every table was occupied, but there

was no feeling of rush or confusion. The clientele was very attractive and the host, Jean Jacques Rachou, to whom I was introduced, was equally so.

Before serving my appetizer I was offered a complimentary portion of pate maison which was delicious. My lunch consisted of fresh asparagus vinaigrette which were cooked perfectly . . . a bit al dente . . . and the sauce was tasteful but delicate. The main course, a specialty of the day, was an invention of the chef de cuisine. It consisted of a seafood filling in a delicious baked pastry-dough blanket. Bay scallops, pike, crabmeat and mushrooms with a light sauce made this a truly delectable entree.

The food at Le Lavandou not only appeals to your taste buds but also to your

visual senses. Everything is served in a manner which takes the greatest advantage of color and, one might say, design.

The salad with lemon and oil dressing was properly tossed, cold and crisp.

Being conscious of my waistline, I refused the beautiful pastry and settled for a raspberry sherbert in a parfait glass topped with a dash of Creme de Cassis. Unlike most French restaurants, the American coffee was perfect.

The wine list offers an excellent selection of wines which is noteworthy not because of its size but because of its good taste. My choice was Puligny Montrachet Joseph Drouhin '73.

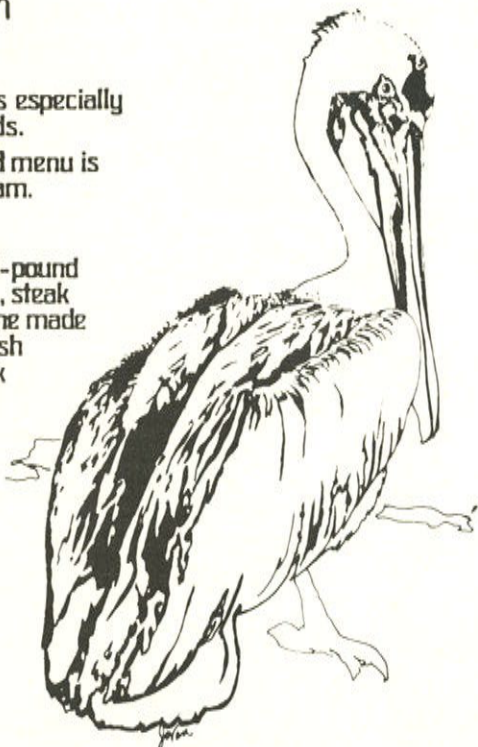
My first visit to Le Lavandou will certainly not be my last one.

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THEATRE / BOOKS

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plot. Of *CABARET*, the author writes: "... one of our greatest musicals", and proceeds to ignore its subject matter except for the following tidbits: "The stories, (*ZORBA* is here joined with *CABARET*), unfolded within outside frames that provided a second, subtextual level of meaning. *CABARET* had its mirror reflecting the audience, its sleazy emcee and cabaret folk controlling the action, watching the drama progress from the sidelines or intruding with vaudeville turns . . . that redoubled the plot's implications."

If you are a theatre person, there's nothing of value here; and if you know *CABARET* only by name and/or album, it's meaningless jargon. Incidentally, although the author considers *CABARET* great, the names of Joe Masteroff, John Van Druten, and Christopher Isherwood never appear in the book. And this is a musical highly thought of by the author, whose delinquency in such matter as writers may lead one to believe his knowledge of the musical theatre stems more from the record than the stage.

Mr. Mordden's reluctance to let us know about his subject knows no bounds. Alas, we shall never know unless we consult one of the solid books on musical theatre.

Yes, Mr. Mordden, the history of American musical theatre includes much of interest, excitement, enjoyment, and personal involvement before "The Black Crook". And to his publisher, the term "history" is not applicable to "... a determinedly idiosyncratic rush through more than a century of styles and forms . . ."—not at fifteen bucks a shot.

Mr. Greenberg is the Director of the St. Louis Municipal Opera, and a professor of Theatre at Queens College.

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